SPECIAL ISSUE!
PC GAMES

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WINTER 1994
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THE ULTIMATE PC GAMER'S GUIDE

162 GAME REVIEWS!

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Adventure

The Year's Top CD-ROM Games

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Kids Games,
Lost Games,
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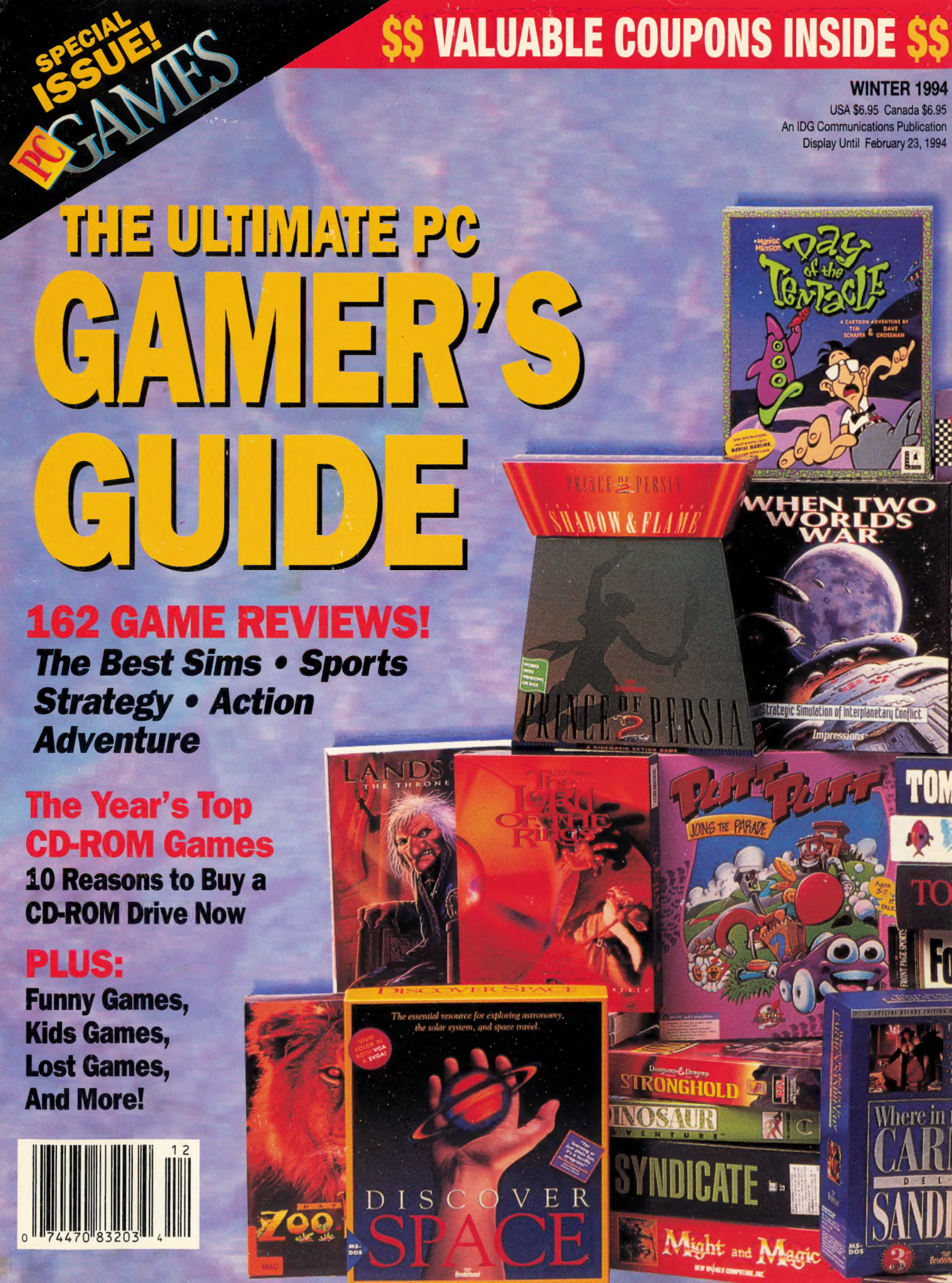

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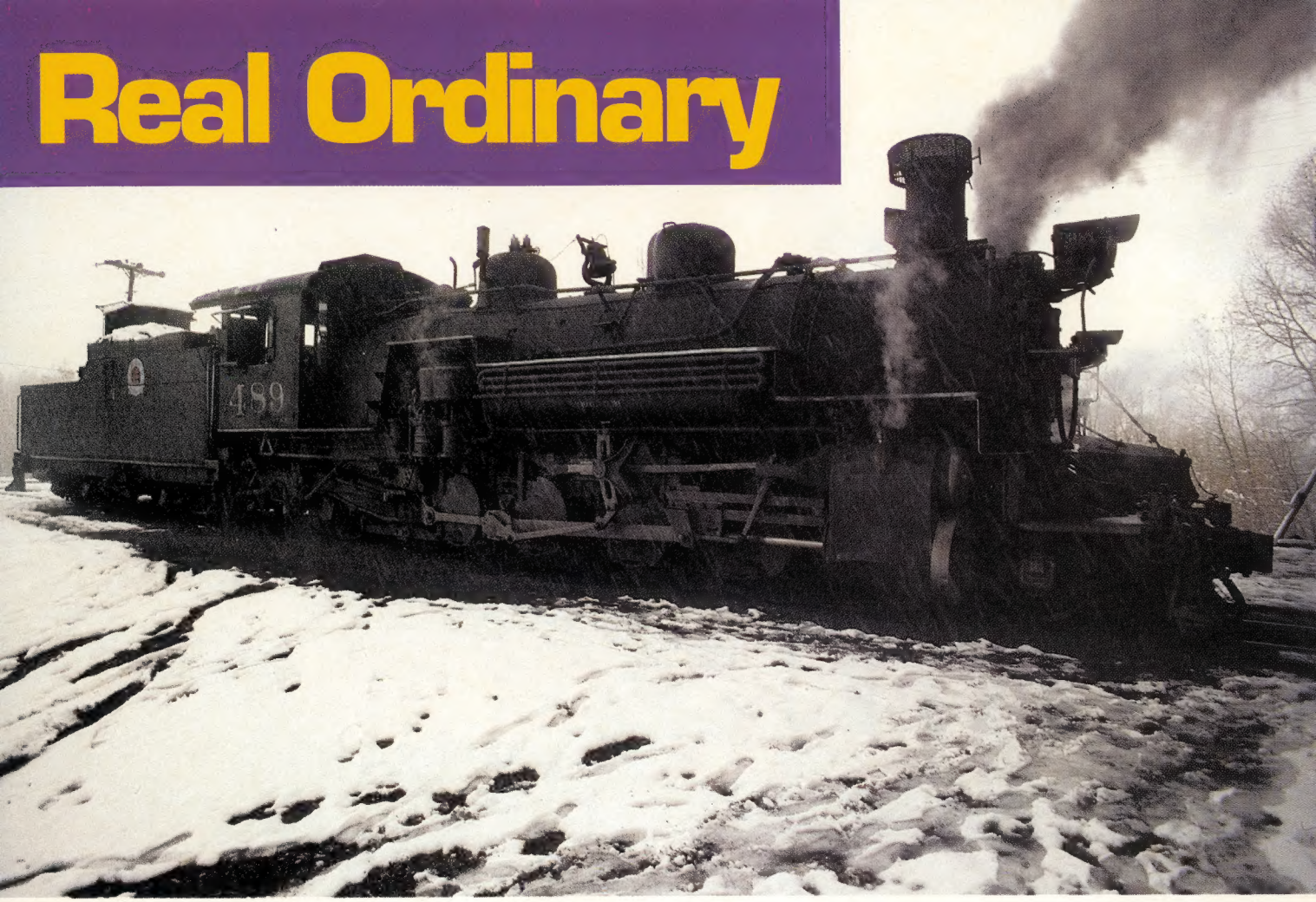

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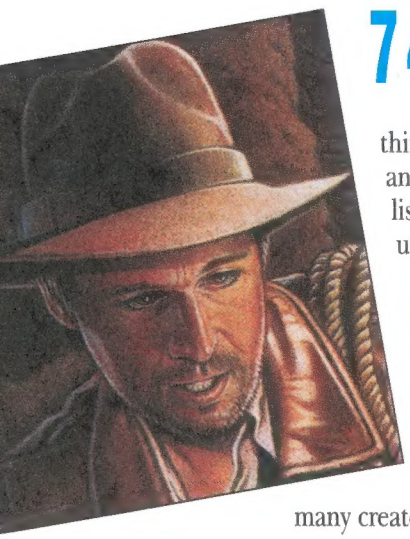
PCGAMES

WINTER 1994
TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURES

58 **THE TOP 10 CDs** By Tom Carlton
Just a year ago, it was a chore to dig up 10 outstanding CD-ROM titles. But all that has changed with the growing CD market. This year, the chore was narrowing it down to only 10 titles. But we did it. After you're done checking out the reviews of this year's best titles, read our sidebar about the ones you should be looking out for in 1994.

66 **THE CLASSROOM COMES HOME** By Cynthia E. Fields
In one short decade computers have radically changed the way we work, play, and learn. Now more than ever, the right set-up in your home can give your kids an edge in school. But how do you get the most for your money? First *PCGames* tells you what you need, and then we give you tips on how to put it all together.



74 **LOST GAMES** By Peter Olafson
All devoted gamers have wondered about the Wasteland of unreleased products. It's the very stuff of computer-game-fanatic life. You hear about a game. Something connects you to that game on a visceral level. You stalk it through development, and rejoice when you hear a release date. But the date seems to slide. You call the publisher in a panic. And you find out that it's "game over" before it even started. *PCGames* uncovers some interesting stories behind the scenes at these doomed projects.

82 **WHAT'S SO FUNNY?** By Joe Hutsko
Part burlesque, part standup bit, part Chevy Chase pratfall, the comedy-adventure game genre is heating up. People shell out anywhere from $25 to $75 for a funny game to make them laugh. And if the game is good, people will continue paying and playing, since most of today's best-sellers are sequels to early, often low-tech originals. Find out what's so funny about these games and why so many creators are having such a hell of a good time.

6 **EDITOR'S PAGE** by Gregg Keizer
Turn out the lights, the party's over

8 **PCG CURRENTS** by Wayne Kawamoto

10 **ROLE CALL** by Peter Olafson
The invisible woman

12 **TOP GUN** by Cameron Crotty
Even the best pilot sometimes needs help

14 **CHILD'S PLAY** by Gregg Keizer
Buying smart for your kids

18 **YOU ARE THERE** by Wayne Kawamoto
War, the old-fashioned way

20 **PERIPHERAL VISION** by Barry Brenesal
Get the good stuff

22 **SPORTS PAGE** by Dan Muse
I thought I had a no-cut contract!

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: MARY MERRICK

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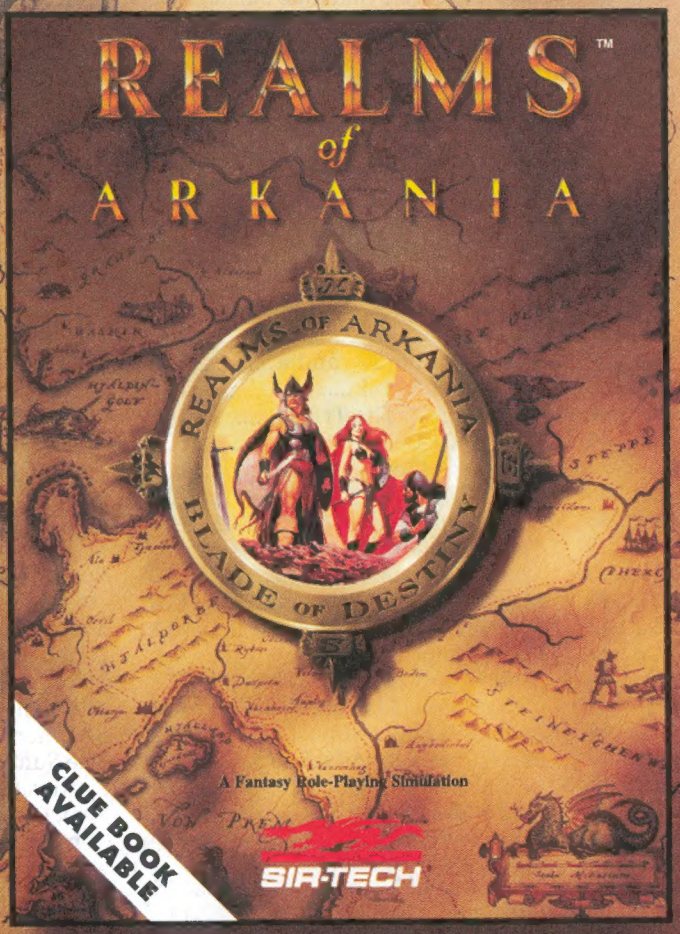

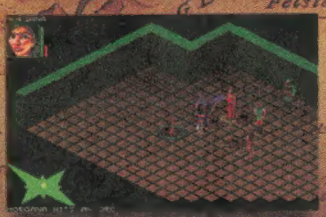
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PC GAMES
WINTER 1994

TABLE OF CONTENTS

162 Reviews!

A-Train 24
Air Bucks 24
Air Force Commander....25
Alone in the Dark....25
Amazon 25
Ambush at Sorinor....26
American Gladiators 26
An American Tail 28
Americans in Space....28
The Animals....30
Arthur's Teacher Trouble....30
Ashes of Empire....32
Atac: the Secret War Against Drugs....34
Atomino 34
Betrayal at Krondor 35
Blade of Destiny 36
Bloodstone 36
Blue Force 37
Boom Box 38
Buzz Aldrin's Race into Space....38
Car and Driver....38
The Carl Lewis Challenge 40
Carrier Strike 40
Carriers at War 42
Clash of Steel 42
Cobra Mission....44
Comanche Maximum Overkill....44
Conquer for Windows....44
Conquered Kingdoms 46
Contraption Zack....48
Crusaders of the Dark Savant....48
The Dagger of Amon Ra 48
Darklands....50
Darkseed 50
Day of the Tentacle....52
Dinosaur Adventure 52
Doom 54
Dr. T's Sing-A-Long 54
Dune 56
Dune II....56
Dungeonmaster....57
Ecoquest II: The Lost Secret of the Rainforest 92
El-Fish....92
Eric the Unready 94
Eye of the Beholder III 94
F-15 Strike Eagle III....95
Follow the Reader with the Mickey Mouse....95
Forge of Virtue 96
Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist....96
Gateway....97
Gods....97
Great Naval Battles of the North Atlantic 98
Greens 98
Harpoon Designers' Series: Battleset Enhancer....99
Harrier Assault 99
High Command 99
Hong Kong Majong Pro....100
Inca....100
The Incredible Machine 101
Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis 101
Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis, CD-ROM....102
Island of Dr. Brain....102
Jake & Jennifer Eagle in Eagle Eye Mysteries 103
John Madden Football II 103
Jump Jet....104
Kings Quest VI....104
Lands of Lore....105
Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2 .105
The Legacy....106
The Legend of Kyrandia....106
Legends of Valor 107
Lemmings 2: The Tribes....107
Liberty Or Death 108
Links 386 Pro....108
Loom CD 108
Lord of the Rings Volume 2 109
The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes....110
Maelstrom....110
Michael Jordan in Flight 111
Microleague Action Sports Soccer 111
Microleague Baseball 4....112
Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0...112
MiG-29: Deadly Adversary of Falcon 3.0 114
Might and Magic: Clouds of Xeen....115
Might and Magic V: Darkside of Xeen 115
Multimedia Pool....116
Mutanoid Math Challenge....117
National Lampoon's Chess Maniac 5 Million and 1....117
New Math Blaster Plus for Windows....118
NFL Video Pro Football....118
Operation Market Garden....119
Out of This World 119
Pacific Islands....120
Pacific War....120
PGA Tour Golf 121
Pit Fighter 121
Populous II: Trials of the Olympian Gods....121
Powermonger 122
Prince of Persia 2 122
Putt-Putt Joins the Parade....123
Putt-Putt's Fun Pack....124
Quarky and Quaysoo's Turbo Science 124
Quest for Glory I 125
Ragnarok 125
Rags to Riches 126
Reading Adventures in Oz 126
Rebel Space 126
Return of the Phantom 128
Return to Zork 128
Rex Nebular and the Cosmic Gender Bender 129
Ringworld 130
Risk for Windows 130
Road and Track Presents Grand Prix Unlimited 131
Rome: Pathway to Power 131
Rusty & Rosy - Read With Me ...132
Science Adventure 133
The Secret of Monkey Island, CD 134
Shadow President 134
Shadowgate for Windows 135
Shadowlands 135
Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective 136
Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective: Vol. II 136
Solitaire for Windows 137
Space Hulk....137
Space Quest V....138
Spaceward Ho!....138
Spectre....139
Spelljammer 139
Spelunx and the Caves of Mr. Seudo 140
Star Control II....140
Strike Commander....141
Stronghold....141
Stunt Island 142
Summer Challenge....142
The Summoning....143
Syndicate 143
Task Force 1942....146
Tengen's Arcade Hits....146
The Terminator 2029 and Operation Scour Mission Expansion Disk 147
Theater of War 148
Time Riders in American History....148
Tony La Russa Baseball II....149
Tony La Russa Baseball II Fantasy Draft Expansion Disk 149
Tornado 150
Treasure Cove! 150
Trolls....151
Ultima Underworld II....152
Ultrabots 152
Utopia....153
V for Victory: D-Day Utah Beach....153
Veil of Darkness 154
VGAStereo-F/X 154
War in the Gulf....155
Waxworks....155
Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3 156
When Two Worlds War....156
Where in Space is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe 157
Wilson Prostaff Golf....157
Wolfenstein 3-D 158
World Circuit: The Grand Prix Simulation 159
X-Wing....160
ZooKeeper....160

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EDITOR'S PAGE

TURN OUT THE LIGHTS, THE PARTY'S OVER

PCGames is closing shop. But it's not going away, not really. As I mentioned in last month's Editor's Page, it will be superseded by a new publication, *Electronic Entertainment. E2* will continue to cover PC games, but it will also devote space to Macintosh, 3DO, CDI, and SegaCD titles. Anything that's electronic and entertaining, that isn't on a video game cartridge, is fair game for *E2*.

And that's how it should be. For no matter how strong PC gaming is at the moment, electronic entertainment is either at, or very near, a fork in the road. What's behind us – a steady run of growth in games and gamers – is vastly different from what lies ahead. Ahead lies much the same kinds of games: sports, simulations, adventure stories, role-playing, and children's games. But these new games will play and look much differently. Rather than a keyboard or joystick, you'll use a hand controller, something like the one that connects to a video game machine. Animation will be smoother, and sound and speech will be far more prevalent. Video will be everywhere, either used as the basis for realistic characters and objects, or as long-running segments.

Who plays, who you play with, and where you play will change, too. The shift from the relatively small circle of PC players to a mass audience will offer all of us millions more opponents, for rather than battle computerized artificial intelligence, you'll spend much of your time playing with others over cable or enhanced telephone lines. And you'll play more digital games in the living room, with the TV set as the display, than in a back room in front of a personal computer.

Whatever it is, it's doing to be *different.* Things are going to change. That's why *PCGames* is stepping aside.

Before it does, though, it needs to doff its ink-stained hat to those who made everything possible. *PCGames* has had many handlers and writers. All merit recognition, but I've only got so many words left.

Dan Muse, a former Editor-in-Chief and sports nut and Cameron Crotty, a former Senior Editor and flight sim fan, let their enthusiasm show in the pages of *PCGames,* and made my magazine time much more entertaining.

Before my tenure here, Lafe Low ran *PCGames.* After that, first Bill Kennedy in New Hampshire, then John Rousseau, Gina Smith, and Beth Cataldo in California guided the magazine through the hurdles of production and printing. Finally, the writers and constant contributors – Wayne Kawamoto, Peter Olafson, Cindy Field, Bernie Yee, and Barry Brenesal, among others – deserve a hand for bringing their gaming expertise to these pages. I'm sure you'll see many, if not all, in the pages of *E2* as the months go by.

It's been fun for me, both playing and writing. Hope you've enjoyed the show. And remember, keep on having fun, no matter what machine you plug in.

– Gregg Keizer, Consulting Editor

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PCGames (ISSN 1042-2943) is a buyer's guide to MS-DOS entertainment software, published 8 times per year for $25.95 per year by Infotainment World, Inc., 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Ste. 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; An IDG Company: The World's Leader In Information Services On Information Technology. Second class postage paid at San Mateo, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PCGames, P.O. Box 59710, Boulder, CO 80322. Change of Address: Please send old label and new address to PCGames, P.O. Box 59710, Boulder, CO 80322. Foreign and Canadian orders must be prepaid in U.S. dollars on a U.S. bank; one year rates (8 issues): Canada $26.00 (price includes GST/ #126038405), Mexico/Foreign Surface $26.00, Foreign Airmail $40.00.

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PCG CURRENTS

New (and soon-to-be-released) PC entertainment products

By Wayne Kawamoto

IT'S JUST A GAME

Dynamix (Eugene, OR) upgrades its popular football game in **Front Page Sports: Football Pro,** a new and even better version. With its predecessor's solid football strategy and tremendous graphics and animation as a start, the $79.95 Pro features players from the National Football League's Players Association. That means the game uses the actual names, numbers, and stats of the real guys.

You can also create coaching profiles – play-calling logic that's based on field position, point differential, yards to go, down, time remaining, and other factors. The game offers better artificial intelligence so that players on the field are more responsive. With this update, Front Page Sports: Football continues to be a major force on the PC gridiron. To see what's going on inside the huddle, call-out Sierra at (800) 743-7725.

Trying to gain excellent field position, Accolade (San Jose, CA) will release **Unnecessary Roughness** ($59.95). This football simulation also licenses players from the National Football League's Players Association and integrates their names, numbers, and statistics into the game. Unnecessary Roughness will also break through the video line by using Super VGA graphics (640 x 480 resolution) and scaled players in a 3-D stadium. The program's Infinity Cam promises that you can view the action from any angle.

In Unnecessary Roughness, you can compete in exhibition games or play through an entire season. You can customize your own leagues, and the program compiles player and team stats throughout. On the strategy side, the simulation offers an extensive playbook, as well as a play creator to build various offensive and defensive plays. Finally, Unnecessary Roughness features the voice of Al Michaels, who calls it as his digital likeness sees it. This season, PC football will have an awesome match-up worthy of the Super Bowl (when Buffalo's not playing). Call Accolade at (408) 296-8400 for the latest.

Football Pro is an enhancement that offers the names, numbers, and stats of pro players, coaching profiles, and even better graphics.

Access (Salt Lake City, UT) will release **Copperhead at Innisbrook** ($29.95), its latest Links Championship Course. As with past add-on courses, Copperhead works with Microsoft Golf as well as with Access' own Links 386 Pro and Links.

Copperhead is known for its sand bunkers, water hazards, and rolling pine-covered terrain. The course, named *Golfweek* Magazine's number one course in Florida for the past six years, is challenging, and Access urges you to "be careful of the viper." For virtual tee times, call Access at (801) 359-2900.

REVELL IN IT

Revell-Monogram (Morton Grove, IL) will release **Backroad Racers** ($69.95), the second in its Power Modeler CD-ROM software line. The entertainment package combines an actual Mustang model kit with a CD-ROM program that shows you how to build four classic muscle cars, including the Boss 302 Mustang, Chevelle SS396, Hemi 'Cuda, and Malibu SS Pro Street. Using a combination of polygon-fill animation and digital sound, the model-building section shows you how to put the cars together and offers tips on gluing, painting, and detailing.

Backroad Racers packages a car model with a program that offers modeling tips and a driving simulation.

The driving simulator lets you take the cars on the road and race against PC competitors. Before the race, you can choose from performance-enhancing options, including a slip rear axle, a supercharger, racing suspension, and nitro charger.

Revell-Monogram promises future titles in the Power Modeler lineup. **Hi-Tech Aircraft** ($69.95) will feature the F-15E Strike Eagle, F-117A Stealth Fighter, F-14A Tomcat, and AH-64 Apache Helicopter. Secret of the Dinosaurs ($69.95) will offer the Allosaurus, Anklyosaurus, Pteranodon, Triceratops, and Tyrannosaurus. Call Revell-Monogram at (800) 473-1993.

SWEATING SOME PIXELS

Rather play computer games than exercise? Sure, it's hard to compare a round of Tetris with a five-mile jog, but when the doctor orders a lower heart rate, what choice do you have? Well, now you can play a game *while* you burn those calories. **The Computer Athlete** (from Computer Athlete, Dublin, OH) comes with software and an infrared sensor that turns your PC and exercise cycle, stair-climber, or rowing machine into an interactive workout game.

Instead of controlling the action with a joystick, you use your exercise equipment. The package's five games – among them a ski race and a rowing competition – motivate you to sweat in front of your computer. You'll also lose weight. For the latest skinny, call Computer Athlete at (800) 860-4506.

THIS WILL GET THE GEARS TURNING

If you think you've pieced together your last contraption in The Incredible Machine by Sierra (Coarsegold, CA), don't put the tools away just yet. There's a sequel: **The Even More Incredible Machine** ($49.95).

Like its predecessor, Even More lets you assemble hilarious machines, Rube Goldberg-style, to accomplish a task and move to the next level. Among the objects are mouse motors, jack-in-the-boxes, ramps, fans, bowling balls, and trampolines. Even More offers 160 puzzles, 56 different animated parts, and a puzzle builder that lets you create, save, and trade puzzles with friends. For more information on this addictive building game, call Sierra at (800) 743-7725.

Microsoft Windows may be the operating environment of the '90s, but Missile Command was the coin-op arcade hit of the '80s. The two come together in **Microsoft Arcade** ($39.95). Here, you can relive yesterday's arcade excitement in coin-op classics like Asteroids, Missile Command, Tempest, Centipede, and Battlezone, but with the convenience of Windows. Surprisingly, the games still play – there's a reason they're called classics. For some retro gaming fun, call Microsoft at (800) 323-3577.

Microsoft Arcade brings classic arcade hits like Centipede to Windows.

BIG SCREENS, FAST SPINS

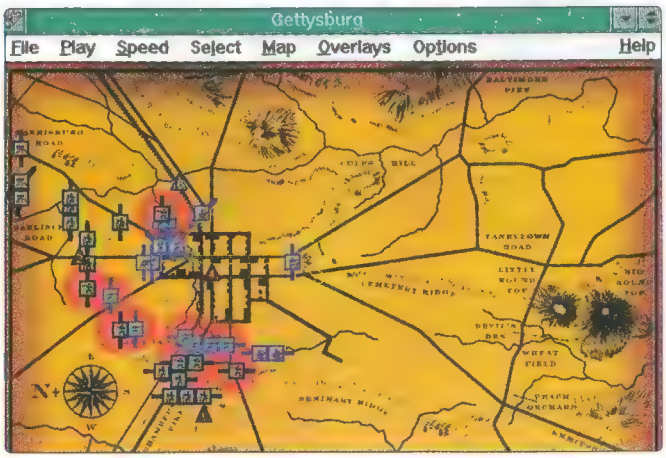
If you're tired of squinting at games on your tiny PC monitor, **GAMEBLASTER** from Advanced Digital Systems (Cerritos, CA) may open your eyes. The device converts your PC's VGA output into a television-compatible video signal (NTSC). The bottom line is that you can play games on your television screen.

The $169 GAMEBLASTER supports up to 640 x 480 VGA resolution in 256 colors. And just in case you need some new games to play on your widescreen TV, GAMEBLASTER comes bundled with Velocity's JetFighter II and Spectre Challenger, and Brøderbund's Prince of Persia. If you want to see the bigger picture, call Advanced Digital Systems at (310) 865-1432.

Creative Labs (Milpitas, CA) will offer new versions of its **SoundBlaster Entertainment CD** and **SoundBlaster Discovery** multimedia upgrade kits. Each offers the capability to upgrade to MPC Level 2 compatibility with a multisession double-speed CD-ROM drive and a SoundBlaster audio board.

The Discovery CD 16 ($649.95) includes a SoundBlaster 16, Aldus' PhotoStyler SE PhotoCD to manipulate and edit images, plus The Software Toolworks' Multimedia Encyclopedia, The San Diego Zoo presents...The Animals, and Brøderbund's Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego Deluxe Edition, and Just Grandma and Me. A lower-priced Discovery CD 8 kit ($549.95) comes with a SoundBlaster Pro Deluxe audio board.

The Edutainment CD 16 ($749.95) combines a SoundBlaster 16 with titles such as The Software Toolworks Multimedia Encyclopedia, Aldus PhotoStyler SE, Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe, The Secret of Monkey Island, Loom, Lemmings, Indianapolis 500 The Simulation, and Sherlock Holmes The Simulation. For more information on your multimedia upgrade, call Creative Labs at (408) 428-6600.



Order cavalry, infantry, and artillery units around in Gettysburg, a recreation of the famous Civil War battle.

WAR WAS HELL EVEN THEN

World War I changed the art of war. Mounted cavalry was out, and tanks, flamethrowers, planes, mustard gas, and trench warfare were in. SSI (Sunnyvale, CA) recreates WWI in **The Great War 1914-1918** ($69.95). This tactical war game promises 60 hours of play for one or two players in some 30 different scenarios. The game progresses through an escalating series of battles and introduces new terrain, units, weather conditions, and tactics along the way.

Integrated within the action are still photos, clips, and enough text to give you some insights into the real war. Each player commands period weaponry and forces, including infantry, cavalry, warships, U-boats, tanks, and planes. For more information, call SSI at (408) 737-6800.

Swifte International (Rockland, DE) just released **Gettysburg** ($49.95), a Windows simulation of the famous Civil War battle. The game puts you in command and lets you order cavalry, infantry, and artillery units around Pennsylvania. You can play either Meade or Lee, and the simulation promises to recreate the historical terrain, forces, weaponry, and morale of the actual battle. Gettysburg will also include profiles, photos, and documents to give an historical perspective. Call Swifte at (302) 234-1740.

THE WORD IS...

Davidson (Torrance, CA) will upgrade its popular **Word Attack** vocabulary game to version 3.0 ($49.95). This new version will offer vocabulary-building activities, like crossword puzzles, mazes, and tile games. It will come with over 3,000 words, support sound effects and high-resolution VGA graphics, and offer text-to-speech capability.

As in the past, excellent performance will be rewarded with printed certificates, and parents and teachers can add their own words. The program also features foreign-language characters to accommodate French, German, and Spanish. For vocabulary-building fun (amusement, pleasure, merriment, entertainment), call Davidson at (800) 545-7677.

By Peter Olafson

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

Where are all the real female characters in role-playing games?

Breasts. Big breasts.

You read that, didn't you? And now you're reading this to see where I'm going to take that, right? Well, welcome to Role Call's version of a sting operation, pal. We got you cold: Guilty of interest in breasts, big breasts.

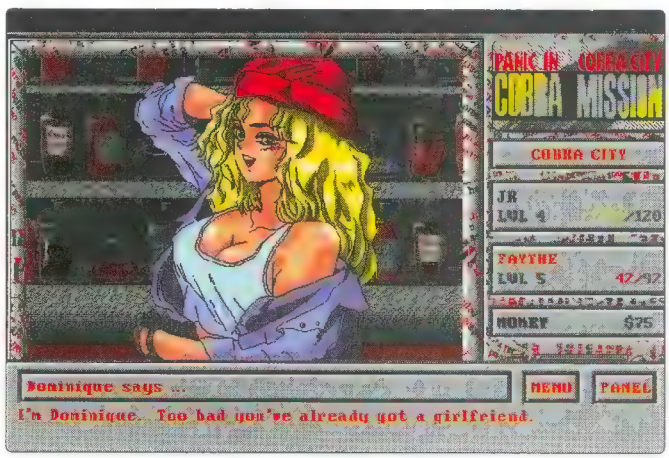
It's just to make a point. Actually, this column is not about breasts of any size. It is about sex – and, unfortunately, sexism – in computer role-playing and adventure games.

I guess we shouldn't be surprised. Sex sells mouthwash, chewing gum, beer, and cigarettes, so why shouldn't it sell computer games? Especially since the typical computer-game player is a guy in his mid-20s. I mean a little sex for role-playing games is nothing when you compare it to the killing off of a whole cities' worth of creatures without the slightest reference to the moral issues involved,

Relationships, sex, and sensuality are issues relatively new to computer games, and perhaps that's why designers have chosen to work with cliché characters: In Ultima VI, the Avatar drops his virtues to do the horizontal bop with a gypsy. In Ultima VII Part II, he takes a lover (we're even treated to a glimpse of the Avatar's tanned buns). In SSI's Treasures of the Savage Frontier, someone in your party gradually gets a girlfriend. There's something a bit geeky and teenaged about the approach the character takes, and this is certainly a start at something interesting. Any semi-realistic approach to sexuality is a start.

By and large, computer games are pretty backwards when it comes to dealing with the opposite sex, portraying every woman like a leggy pinup. What's this with armor designed with cleavage?

To find even more of the same concepts in female characters, peek at the slick ad for Legend's forthcoming Companions of Xanth, which features a part woman/part snake thing holding a sword and wearing little more than a tiara and brassiere. Or explore a pyramid in Bane of the Cosmic Forge, and find women with large breasts trying to kill you.



Sex sells computer games. But do all female characters have to be clichés?

The sex-game phenomena isn't exclusive to adventures. I tried to play Castles as a queen, and I discovered that this queen looks a whole lot like the king. And if you've explored arcade-adventures like Stormlord and Vampire's Empire, you'll quickly discover there's a lot more on display than you may have bargained for.

Why are there so few women in featured roles – Roberta Williams is responsible for as many female leads as the rest of the industry combined – and why do women characters wear armor from Frederick's of Hollywood?

I've gone through those role-playing shops with male characters, and I haven't seen a leather Chippendale's thong bikini for sale anywhere, but somehow all the female fighters are dressed for a fantasy parade in the wrong part of town. It may be alluring, but it's certainly not practical. With that kind of exposure of flesh, how can she defend herself from Mr. Orc as he tries to slash her with his sword?

Then there's the women who turn up in games cast as the role of prize (the princess) or the New-Age earth mother – healer, druid or other witchy-washy creatures. This is just substituting one cliché for another. Even Tolkien had the yarbles to make one of his women a warrior.

C'mon, these characters shouldn't be just pieces of meat or eye candy, or inventory items, either. They're women, virtual sure, but still women. They should reflect reality somewhat and push beyond the limits of outdated stereotypes. How about a little imagination: I want a female character that can fight the good fight, and who has the brains to wear an outfit that makes sense. ❑

By Cameron Crotty

HOW 'BOUT SOME HELP HERE?

Even the best pilot needs a hand once in a while.

Being a hot pilot isn't enough these days. If you want to live more than a moment in hostile skies, you'd better have a good strategy-and-tactics head on your shoulders, too.

But learning more than the mechanics of most flight sims is as tough as a first day on the job. No one wants to take the time to teach you the ropes. Flight simulator manuals sure don't want to play mission-planning instructor. Grab the documentation and do a quick comparison. How many pages teach you how to fly the plane? How many tutor you in the fine art of air combat? Betcha the first number is a lot bigger than the second.

Too often, companies simply pass the buck. "Here's how all this stuff works," their manuals say. "After you've died a couple of hundred times, you'll figure it all out." Is this necessary? Is basic training in air warfare strategy and tactics too much to ask?

Some manuals actually spend a great deal of time on the topic. One of my favorites is MicroProse's helicopter simulator, Gunship 2000. Possibly because helicopter tactics aren't common knowledge, the Gunship 2000 manual spends time describing different types of attacks, how to avoid radar, how to use terrain, how to equip and lead a team, and how to accomplish your mission.

Contrast this with Falcon 3.0, which bombards you with technical data about allies, enemies, and weapons, not to mention sophisticated mission planning and reconnaissance tools, but leaves you with little real feel for how to use any of them.

Get with it, people! We're asking for a little help here.

Of course, I'm ready to tell all you hotshots – flight sim writers and overwhelmed tyros alike – what needs to be done. That's why they pay me the big money.

WISE UP, SIM WRITERS

• Give us mission planning equipment that works intuitively and displays data in easily digestible formats. Realism for its own sake is great, but some of the arcane crap that many mission planners put us through is ridiculous. And though most of us have mice on the desk, we also have joysticks; it would be nice if we could plan our missions with the latter instead of trying to clear a space for the rodent.

If it looks complicated, it probably is. We need help planning missions, not just flying the planes.

• Spend some time in the manual telling us how to fly your particular beast – not just competently, but intelligently – particularly on ground-pounding missions. I had a buddy once who kept getting stomped by SAMs every time he went out. It turns out that when the manual said to "fly low to avoid SAMs," he thought they meant 1,000 feet. Learning the finer points of dogfighting is important, but since objectives are usually on the ground, beginners need to be taught how to deal with them.

TAKE IT EASY, ROOKIE

• Take it slow. Jumping into the cockpit is fun, but flight simulators are designed to be almost like role-playing games, savored for months, not devoured in a few days. You paid a lot of money for that box – take your time and learn every nook and cranny of the sim. If you repeatedly bite off more than you can chew, you'll get frustrated and quit.

• Take it easy. You don't have to fly against advanced enemies with all the cockpit bells and whistles active. If you keep getting blown away, tone down the competition a notch.

• Take it any way you can get it. If you find yourself overwhelmed by options, remove some. If you can't figure out how many resources to commit, start with an arbitrary number and try to imagine how the mission will run. Where will you be short? Is there someplace that an extra weapon would take the place of a pilot? On the other hand, what happens in an emergency? Don't underestimate your enemy, and don't forget to assign CAP (Combat Air Patrols).

Clear Skies! ❑

WIN!

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THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

WIN:
this 50 Mhz
486 PC,
8 Meg RAM,
340 Meg HD
17" SVGA
Monitor, more...

MONSTER MACHINE

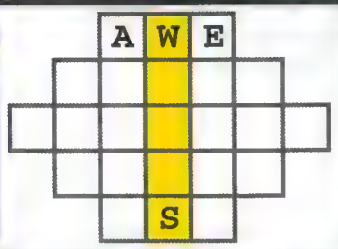
You have the POWER: In this contest you don't rely on the luck-of-the-draw. You determine if you win or not. You win by outscoring others in a game of skill. Can you solve the puzzle below? Then you have what it takes. It looks simple, but it's only the start. Each of five more puzzles gets a little harder. But this time it's all up to you. Stay in to the end with the highest score and the gear is yours. With whatever options you want. Do you have what it takes? Then play to win!

Bonus Prize Options Include: CD-ROM Drive, Thrustmaster Joystick and Weapons Controller, Sound Blaster 16 Sound Card, Speakers, Modem, Cash, Accessories and more!

Directions: Fill in the Mystery Word Grid with the correct words (going across) that spell out the Mystery Word down the middle. Hint: use the mystery word clue.

In the future: There will be four more puzzles at $2.00 each and one tie-breaker at $1.50. You will have three weeks to solve each puzzle (suspense is part of the game!). We don't know how many people will enter but typically 47% will advance through Phase I, 30% through Phase II, 25% through Phase III, and 20% through Phase IV. The tie-breaker determines the winner. If players are still tied they will each receive the grand prize they are playing for.

Mystery Word Grid



WORD LIST

FRONT	ZOO	LINKS	ACE	MIGHT
ASK	TABLE	FIT	GAMES	THE
NEBULAR	RUNNING	CAPTAIN	TRILOGY	CARRIER
SPACE	AWE	ROGUE	FAR	PRINT
ANT	GREAT	JET	FIGHT	WIN

MYSTERY WORD CLUE:
Aviators earn them, birds have them and so do jets.

Yes! ENTER ME TODAY, HERE'S MY ENTREE FEE:

☐ ($5.00) Monster Machine Contest

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Fulfill The Ancient Prophesy

Your Father, the last king of Alonia, failed his quest to liberate the realm from inhuman tyrants. Now it's your turn. As Tris, the last heir to the throne, it's your destiny to match sword and sorcery against the foul Ruzakian Hord. Seek incredible magicks to augment your power as you delve into the conquered city of Hedburg. A virtual 3-D fantasy world awaits your next command - Explore the dangers of the Old City, pit your awesome might against horrible creatures in a dark dungeon. Fight well and you may free the kingdom. Discover the Forgotten Castle and you may learn of your father's fate...

- Cinematic animation sequences unfold stories of mystery.
- Fully digitized musical score and sound effects.
- Combat system has adjustable skill levels.
- Monsters, characters, magic items and props are rendered with full 3-D effects.
- A smooth scrolling virtual world, complete with unparelled realism for die-hard fantasy role playing enthusiasts!

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By Gregg Keizer

SMART KIDS

You need to buy smart if you want your kids to get smart.

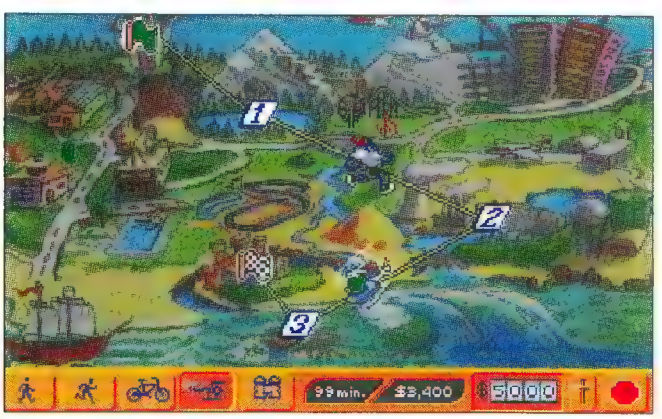
Promises, promises. That's software for you, making promises it can't keep. Software for the office promises to make you a writing wizard, a priestess of presentations. Kids' software promises to turn lackluster readers into library card carriers, to punch up math skills in no time, to whip every kid into a geographic frenzy. Implicitly, kids' software says it's going to make kids smarter. Much smarter.

But does learning software *really* make kids smarter? That's like asking if watching TV makes them dumber. Sure, it's easy to believe that the answer's intuitive, but there's more to electronic learning than meets the eye. Putting your child in front of the computer and demanding that she learn her multiplication tables by playing Math Blaster may actually get results, but so would sitting down with a deck of low-tech flash cards. It's not so much the medium as the message.

So rather than mentally tout the smarts your kid will acquire with learning software, do something smart yourself, and shift your strategies a bit. When you're walking through the store, keep these things in mind.

SELECT FOR SKILL

Pick software based on the skill you want your kid to practice. That doesn't mean looking at programs with the word *math* in their title when you're searching for a package to help your child learn his tables. It means you should stick to those programs whose *primary* mission is delivering math tutoring. Some programs try to be a little bit of everything. Unless you're shopping for a preschooler, avoid such all-subject software.



Quarky and Quasoo's Turbo Science is one program to consider when you're trying to plug the gaps in the classroom curriculum.

CHOOSE FOR CUSTOMIZATION

Even the smartest program doesn't know how your child learns, or where she's at the start. Look for programs that let you make changes, add problems, and set levels. The Learning Company's Spellbound, for instance, lets you add words to the spelling lists. Even a little customization goes a long way toward learning.

PICK CDS FOR PRESCHOOLERS

Most of the worthwhile CD-ROM discs hold software that will benefit preschoolers more than older kids. CDs' audio abilities are perfect for tykes who can't read or who are just beginning to read. You should encourage older kids, though, to read for themselves. If you have a child seven years or younger, make sure you have a CD-ROM drive in your PC.

GAUGE THE AGE RANGE

Most learning software gives you an age range on the box, but don't take it literally. Use your knowledge of your child's abilities and skill levels when you pick a program. If your child generally performs above grade level in the classroom, a title that tops out at her age will probably not challenge her. The opposite's true, too. If your third-grader has substantial problems in math, for instance, stay away from programs that claim to serve eight-year-olds and up.

PLUG THE CURRICULUM HOLES

With budget cuts standard almost everywhere, even the finest school districts are dropping programs. You can help plug those learning gaps with appropriate software. If science is nonexistent in your child's school, put some science-related software on the hard disk drive and encourage your kid to use it.

THE 3:00 BELL

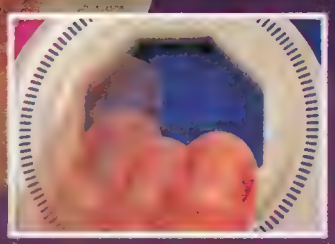
This is my last Child's Play column, for next month *PCGames* is mutating into a new publication, *Electronic Entertainment*. E2 will continue to cover children's software – not only on the PC, but also on the Macintosh and the new 3DO Interactive Multiplayer – but Child's Play won't be along for the ride. I've enjoyed writing this column, and I hope you've picked up a few tips.

Keep the computer on, and keep those kids learning. ❑

TURBO TOUCH 360,™ THE STATE OF THE ART PC GAME CONTROLLER!

For use with IBM® PCs and compatibles

Gives you better diagonal control



Gives you easy circular control

Faster movement for higher scores

No more blisters or "numb thumb"

Extensively consumer-tested with game players, software developers and computer game reviewers, the Triax Turbo Touch 360 controller brings a new dimension of control and comfort to computer game playing. It's a breakthrough product, offering the benefit of higher scores and longer play without "thumb fatigue." Just pass your thumb or index finger over the control sensor—you don't have to push down. And, thanks to better diagonal and circular (360°) control, the newest and most challenging games are easier to control and more fun to play. The Turbo Touch 360 is the right product at the right time.

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For the name of your nearest Turbo Touch 360 retailer or to place an order, call 1-800-858-7429

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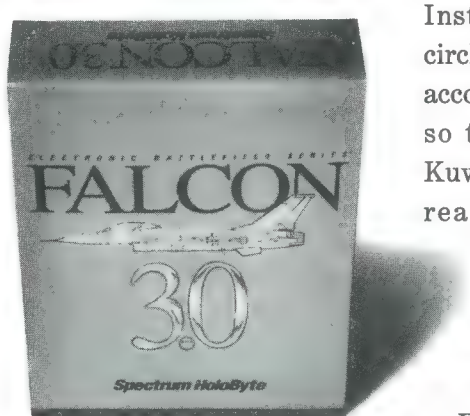
SURROUNDED BY ANTI-AIRCRAFT. HUNTED BY SAMS. EVEN MACH 2 ISN'T FAST ENOUGH. IT'S A STORY CAPTAIN DEAN PENNINGTON DIDN'T THINK HE'D LIVE TO TELL. WOULD YOU?

A TRUE STORY

Kuwait, May 23, 1991. Captain Dean "D-Dawg" Pennington dives to take out an Iraqi 85mm gun emplacement below. "Flares, break left!" his wingman screams. He wrenches the stick just as a SAM explodes 10 feet behind his F-16. Anti-aircraft batteries now open up all around, engulfing him. Too low to avoid the anti-aircraft, too slow to evade another SAM, he's faced with a hopeless choice and less than a quarter of a second to make it. Lighting afterburners, he rockets to safety before they can lock on again.

THE STANDARD BY WHICH OTHER FIGHTERS ARE JUDGED

Captain Pennington survived on skill, nerve and the awesome capabilities of the F-16 Fighting Falcon. Nothing, aside from a true F-16, captures the "hair-on-fire" feeling of flying America's most deadly fighter like *Falcon® 3.0,* Spectrum HoloByte's computer simulation.



A HIGHER LEVEL OF FLIGHT

Unlike some sims, which more closely simulate the arcade experience than the flying one, *Falcon 3.0* features a depth of play that almost rivals real life. Like real pilots, you'll fly with a wingman, allowing you to engage in aerial tactics like bracket maneuvers. Instead of enemies who fly in circles, *Falcon 3.0* adversaries fly according to true fighter doctrine so they're no pushovers. And Kuwait looks like Kuwait since real geographic theaters are faithfully mapped.

With Falcon 3.0, up to six players can go mano a mano. May the best man win.

SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE

NOT JUST A SIMULATION OF A WARPLANE A SIMULATION OF WAR

Falcon 3.0 lets you fight as part of an entire campaign. The missions you fly play a crucial role in your side's success. But they're not hard-wired. Each result affects the overall war effort—and determines your next mission. Succeed

For Visa/MasterCard orders call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: (800) 695-GAME.
For technical questions call (510) 522-1164 (M-F: 9AM-5PM Pacific Time).

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and go on to hit the enemy in his own backyard. Fail and find the bad guys breathing down your neck.

FALCON 3.0 vs. MiG-29

Electronic Battlefield Series simulations link up. So you don't just choose your mission, you choose your aircraft. Care to fly for the other side, comrade?

THE ELECTRONIC BATTLEFIELD SERIES: THE ULTIMATE CYBER-BATTLEFIELD

Choose from multiple aircraft, multiple theaters, even which side of the conflict to fight on. Go head-to-head over a modem or with up to six players over a network. It's possible because each *Electronic Battlefield Series* title works with the others, from *MiG-29*™ to the upcoming F/A-18 simulation. There's even a multimedia guide to air-to-air combat called *Art of the Kill*™ to help you fly like an ace. It all starts with *Falcon 3.0*.

The simulation for people who want to fly the not-so-friendly skies.

Spectrum HoloByte

ELECTRONIC BATTLEFIELD SERIES

The fight of your life.

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By Wayne Kawamoto

WAR, THE OLD FASHIONED WAY

Learn some virtual combat lessons from a Chinese master.

Whether you fight with horse-drawn chariots or high-powered tanks, smoldering fire or searing blitzkrieg, pointed spears or sharp-shooting rifles, strategy is the key to winning battles. Centuries ago, Sun Tzu wrote The Art of War, which lives on as a guide to the those who want to prevail in combat.

But can Sun Tzu's timeless writings bring insight and winning strategies to today's PC war games? You bet. Sun Tzu could not have known about PCs, but his strategies work on the virtual battlefield nonetheless.

"If our forces are ten to the enemy's one," Tzu writes, "surround him; if five to one, attack him; if twice as numerous, divide our army into two, one to meet the enemy in front, and one to fall upon his rear."

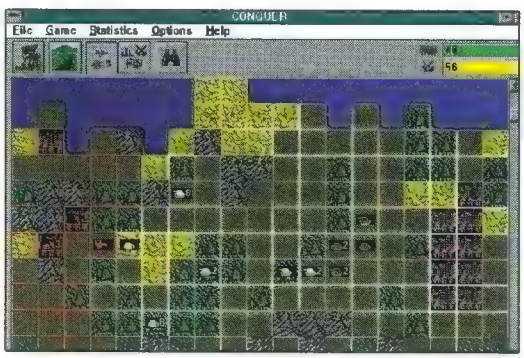
Tzu continues, "If he [the enemy] replies to the frontal attack, he may be crushed from behind; if to the rearward attack, he may be crushed in front."

This approach works in Patton Strikes Back – Brøderbund's recreation of WWII's Battle of the Bulge. In Patton, any unit that's surrounded will scatter in panic, and the direction a unit faces affects its strength and readiness. Attack a unit with a frontal assault, and it may drive you back, but hit it from behind and you'll cause some damage. If you can manage to attack with one unit from the front, another from the rear, you'll definitely be in command.

"...One who is skillful at keeping the enemy on the move maintains deceitful appearances, according to which the enemy will act," says Tzu. "He sacrifices something that the enemy may snatch at...by holding out baits...then with a body of picked men he lies in wait for him."

This bait and strike approach works in almost any strategy game, from chess on down. On the PC, New World Computing's Empire Deluxe and Elpin's Conquer, both games of global warfare and conquest, immediately come to mind. Besides attacking and expanding your empire and war production facilities, you can adapt "bait and swat" as one of many strategies.

For instance, you can send a group of weaker pieces ahead into enemy territory, then follow with stronger forces that are just out of enemy sight. When the enemy attacks the bait, your larger force lies ready to decimate him. This can be very effective and will keep your opponent – even a computerized one – guessing.



Elpin's Conquer lets you use Tzu's "bait and swat" tactic to achieve global conquest.

Although most PC war games play on two-dimensional boards or grids, many do consider terrain. Tzu understood how to use the terrain. He says, "In crossing salt marshes, your sole concern should be to get over them quickly, without any delay...because they are low, flat, and exposed to attack. If forced to fight in a salt marsh," he continues, "you should have water and grass near you, and get your back to a clump of trees."

You can use terrain almost exactly as Tzu describes it in MicroProse's Pirates! Gold. In land battles, moving armies across a swamp is slow, and the men are vulnerable. Forests, on the other hand, provide excellent cover and protection from enemy fire. The ideal situation in Pirates! is to lure the enemy into a swamp, then have your forces fire into them from a nearby forest.

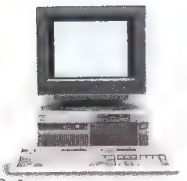
Sun Tzu speaks of a soldier's spirit in battle: "A clever general...avoids an army when its spirit is keen, but attacks it when it is sluggish."

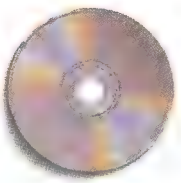
In many games, you can take on superior forces if the opposing units are running scared. Campaign, by Empire Software, is a war-strategy game that recreates WWII, even going so far as to represent troop status with happy and sad faces.

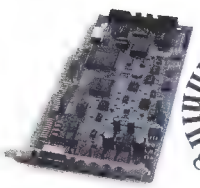
As in real life, nothing replaces planning and intelligence on the virtual battlefield. "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

Bottom line? Know thy PC, thy enemy, thy game (read thy manual), and thyself. And kick some booty. ❑

In desperation I asked my friend about Multimedia. She said it's simple. To turn your computer into a multimedia funhouse you need an award-winning Pro AudioSpectrum™ 16 sound card. Sounds great I said. But she wasn't done. I should also get a great CD-ROM drive and a pair of amplified speakers so I can walk through the jungle, talk to Columbus or even explore a haunted house. And all this stuff should be easy to use and set up in my computer automatically. So I asked—where the heck am I going to find all this in one affordable package?







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By Barry Brenesal

GET THE GOOD STUFF

Top-notch pieces and parts make a primo PC game system.

PCGames may be mutating into *Electronic Entertainment,* but Peripheral Issues isn't going along for the ride. It's going the way of all things, good and bad, whose brief time has come and gone – the Pyramids, the Norse gods, George Bush. Kidding aside, it's been fun, and I hope you've garnered some useful tips on mice, memory managers, and monitors from this column.

A sturdy keyboard with 34 function keys, the Keytronic KB 3270 Plus Keyboard is more than your average clone.

I thought we might spend our last moments together assembling a good, PC-based gaming system, taking into account the best that technology can offer.

Keytronic KB 3270 Plus Keyboard. This isn't your average keyboard clone. It's much sturdier, with more metal than plastic, and it has mainframe features, like 24 function keys at the top and another 10 at the left.

So what do you do with all those extra function keys? Reprogram them, using the enclosed software utility. Give them short commands, or complex, multiple ones. Create multiple key configurations geared to different games, and store them in separate files for easy loading. They take no extra memory, and the reprogramming process is relatively painless.

Microspeed PC-TRAC Trackball. I know cordless trackballs get good press, but there's still that occasional signal loss to contend with. And it usually happens just when you're maneuvering in for the kill on some alien battlecruiser.

PC-TRAC doesn't have that problem. It's also 100% Microsoft-compatible and easy to install. The tapered, ergonomic design features three large buttons in a collar around the central ball. It's very easy on the wrist – a must, whether you're flying a mission against Microsoft Excel or several Kilrathi scoutships. This is a solid, reliable performer with good technical support.

Sony 17-inch Trinitron Multiscan CPD-1730 monitor. With game detail increasing almost by the minute, you'll need a good 17-inch monitor to see it all. This Sony monitor is among the best available, for its Trinitron system uses a single three-color gun for electron excitation, instead of the standard three-color, three-gun approach. The result is a smaller angle of source displacement, with less red-green-blue jaggedness than the competition.

Another feature of the CPD-1730 is Sony's stripe grill, which helps focus electron firing. It lets far more of the electron beam reach your screen than a conventional Invar shadow mask. As a result, the CPD-1730 has a clearer, brighter color image. That 256-color SuperVGA game will really look Super on a CPD-1730.

Any good AdLib Gold/SoundBlaster Pro Clone. It's been a Year of the Sound Card Catch-Up, as various manufacturers issued or upgraded to the OPL-3 FM synthesis chip. Logitech's SoundMan 16 is among the best, but it's a fairly even playing field in sound card land.

NEC MultiSpin-74 external CD-ROM drive. Although most 1993 CD-ROM games were reissues of hard disk versions, things should change in 1994. Many developers have taken a long, serious look at the success of Virgin Games' 7th Guest. So be prepared, and get a good CD-ROM drive. The NEC MultiSpin-74 is arguably the best, with a 300K/second data transfer rate – absolutely essential for flicker-free visuals. It's got a double door and automatic lens cleaning system for enhanced dust protection.

There are better package deals available, but bundling old software doesn't count for much if your drive can't keep up with the newer titles. The MultiSpin-74 is the way to go.

A fast 486 CPU. Afraid so. Many games will run perfectly well on a 386/20 or even a 386/16, but that won't be the case much longer. Developers are planning new products and sequels that require the speed of a good 486 to process data quickly.

Price wars lowered the cost of a good 486DX2/50 enough so that you don't have to look hard to find something in the $1500–$2200 range. A few outstanding models I've seen and tested include the Austin 486DX2/50 WinStation, the AMAX 486DX2/50 Power Station, and the Unitek UT0486DX/50C.

Good luck with your future gaming purchases. And may you successfully visit many alternate realities in the years to come. ❑

TRAVEL TO EXOTIC LANDS, MEET STRANGE CREATURES AND BLOW THEM AWAY!

You've always considered yourself a soldier of fortune with a knack for survival and a thirst for green. Your mission? Anything for a price. But this time it's different. The stakes are a little bit greater and the danger is all too real. You and your team are on a desolate moon, surrounded by less than friendlies, with only one goal besides the mission itself; stay alive long enough to enjoy your newfound wealth.

Hired Guns is an adventure that can accommodate up to four players simultaneously. It features furious non-stop action, first person 3-D view and auto-mapping of the 1.7 million cubic meters of play area. Choose from 12 different richly developed characters to suit your needs for the mission at hand. Journey through this desolate land, all the while testing your survival skills. And remember; TAKE NO PRISONERS!

Hired Guns is available on IBM compatible and Amiga formats.

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BUY SMART, PLAY HARD

Wait a minute! I thought I had a no-cut contract!

In professional sports, players are traded, left hanging without a contract, or simply cut. Players live with that constant, if not spoken, fear. Magazine columnists, too, can never relax. In addition to dealing with new issues and emerging trends, there's always a younger, faster, hungrier writer out there. Or sometimes you lose your edge in a particular area. Or in this case, *PCGames* is simply being incorporated into an exciting new magazine. You can count on that new publication, called *Electronic Entertainment,* to continue to cover the coolest sports games.

Still, it marks the end of Sports Page, your monthly meeting place for the latest in sports entertainment software. So before the final gun goes off, here are a few ground rules about choosing sports games worthy of your dollars.

Don't Fall for the Wheaties Approach

Never make a buying decision based on the name of the sports celebrity endorsing the game. While many athletes and coaches play valuable roles in the design of a game, other endorsements are just part of a marketing campaign. Even when the athlete or coach *is* involved in design, the insight of an expert is secondary to the game's user interface; its graphics, animation, and sound; and its intelligence. When the endorsement accompanies a significant amount of consulting, the game's play *does* benefit, but remember that a bad game is just as likely to have a famous face on its cover.

Get to Know the Developer

Follow the software developers, not necessarily the company that publishes your favorite games. (For instance, though Strategic Simulations, Inc., markets and sells Tony La Russa Baseball, StormFront Studio is the developer.) Keep track of their work. Some developers will design games exclusively for one software publisher, but often they work contract by contract, flitting from one to another with regularity. (Sounds like free agency, doesn't it?)

Word of Mouth is Still the Best Advertising

If you have friends or colleagues who also play computer sports games, ask them for recommendations.

One shopping tip in sports is to look for games that offer add-ons, like this Fantasy League Disk for Tony La Russa II.

If you're a subscriber to an online service, you can head there for info on hot new sports games. Of course, one of the best ways to avoid the bow-wows will be to read *Electronic Entertainment.*

Don't Hold Back

If you don't get satisfaction, let the software publisher know – not enough game players take a pro-active approach. The PC entertainment software market is still small compared to the cartridge market, so your voice has a good chance of being heard. If a title has an inadequate manual, for example, let the publisher know. The same is true for tedious copy-protection procedures. Schemes that require you to count lines and words in the manual or to squint at oddly colored paper and ink are more irritating than necessary.

Long for Longevity

Some types of sports games, such as golf and baseball simulations, are well-suited to add-on disks. Since playing golf on the same course or baseball with the same teams can get a little boring, you'll get better life out of your investment if the game's publisher has a healthy supply of add-on products.

Know What to Buy Before You Get to the Store

Unless you've discovered a gem, don't rely on advice from computer stores or mass merchants. My informal polling showed most sales people either have no opinion, or simply recommend the best seller or the first game they see on the shelf. So read magazines, talk to friends, and use the online services.

The Two-Minute Warning

Time has just about run on the Sports Page. Shop wisely, play hard, and remember....

It's only a game. ❑

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PCG REVIEWS

A-TRAIN

There's a light at the end of the tunnel, and it's Maxis' **A-Train** comin' at ya. Like the golden spike that tied together the transcontinental railway, this first-rate, thoughtful, visually attractive, and addictive simulation ties together lots of diverse elements.

In A-Train, you build your metropolis from the ground up, track by track and building by building, using your instincts as a financial investor, city commissioner, and urban planner. The railways are the lifeblood of the city and the key to your success.

You start with a sparsely populated rural area. Lay out the rails, then build apartments, factories, mass transit systems, and commercial zones. Later you can add stadiums, amusement parks, ski resorts, even golf courses. Everything, though, depends on the trains.

Eventually, the cities begin to grow. Watch the population boom, trains carry freight, and workers commute to their jobs. If you're successful, you'll have a skyline full of skyscrapers.

Like other Maxis simulations such as SimCity, A-Train is an experimental environment. The game has something of a goal, but there is no real threshold for victory. In fact, it's this quality that makes A-Train such a pleasure to play. Every accomplishment, from the time your railroad shows a profit to when you achieve the next level for your city, makes you feel like a proud parent beaming at Junior's first tooth.

A-Train sports a steeper learning curve than most games, and the results may be too methodical for some. But there's always something to do: check your progress, watch your trains, and evaluate your investments. A bank hands out loans for additional ventures, and you can speculate on real estate, or take risks in a stock market for *some* potential returns. A-Train is an exercise in miniature, digital capitalism.

A-Train is a great game that requires a methodical approach but is a pleasure to play. Hop aboard. For those who are willing to persevere, the rewards are great.

NOT RATED

Maxis, 2 Theater Square, Suite 230, Orinda, CA 94563-3346, (510) 254-9700; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; Hercules/EGA/VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster, SoundMaster, and Roland and Tandy sound; hard-disk drive required; $69.95

AIR BUCKS

If you think running your own airline might be fun, Impressions' **Air Bucks** may be just the ticket.

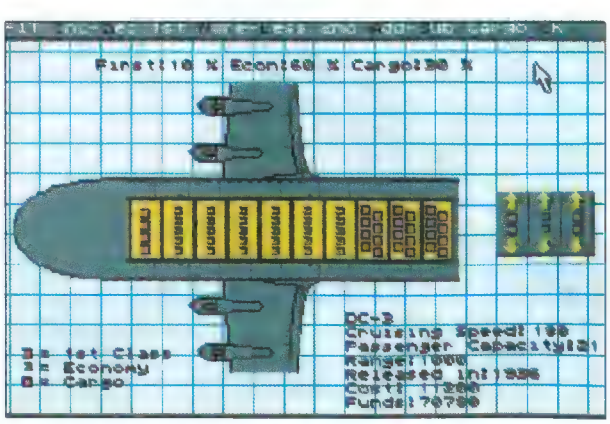
It all starts in 1946 at an airport in Miami, Florida. You're a seasoned 20-year-old with a Dakota DC-3, $100,000 in the bank, and a dream. You're about to start a new airline called Air Bucks. Can you take a one-plane airline and make it a globe-spanning megacorporation? You've got 40 years to do it, and three formidable competitors to ensure that the skies aren't entirely friendly.

First, you decide what routes to set up, then purchase the right to land at your choice of airports. The planes you buy for your routes make a difference. Passengers prefer faster planes; slower planes that carry more people are lucrative but come with higher maintenance costs. You also set the ratio of first-class to coach seats and determine how much space to reserve for cargo.

As you'd expect, ticket prices affect sales and, ultimately, profits. You can price your tickets high and sell fewer seats, or you can sell at a lower price and hope to fill those planes. The Air Bucks program features a miniature economics engine that introduces random variables and determines market conditions.

Any combination of human players and the computer can control the four airlines. Head-to-head competition with other people makes for potentially exciting game play, as players can swap, negotiate, and form alliances.

Air Bucks' graphics images are subpar when compared with current entertainment-software standards. The interface is also rough in places. To select airports you click on them with the mouse. But with one view of the entire earth, cities such as Pittsburgh and Boston are only a millimeter apart – the program needs a zoom. The controls for set-



Impression Software's Airbucks puts you in charge of an airline, discount fares and all.

ting a route and assigning a plane aren't intuitive, either.

As it stands, Air Bucks is fun to play and a solid strategy game, but it needs some refinement before it really takes off.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Impressions Software, 7 Melrose Dr., Farmington, CT 06032, (203) 676-0127; IBM PC or compatible 386SX (16MHz or faster recommended); 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive required; mouse recommended; $59.95

AIR FORCE COMMANDER

The Middle East – the world's powder keg. Ancient hostilities combine with leading-edge firepower and satellite intelligence to make this flashpoint between cultures and religions ripe for war.

Air Force Commander simulates part of a potential conflict in this cramped military camp. You get control of the aircraft and resources of a nation or group of allies in any of 28 Middle Eastern air war scenarios.

This strategy simulation will test your military management and electronic warfare talents, so top guns had better look somewhere else for challenge and thrill.

As commander you're faced with a satellite map of the Middle East. Pointing and clicking zooms the radar screen to reveal white, red, green, and blue dots, which represent various ground installations, roads, and major cities. Pointing at these installations gives you some up-close-and-personal satellite information.

Sooner than later you'll notice red and white poles heading toward your airspace. These are enemy aircraft, and the length of the pole represents their altitudes. The enemy begins attacking right away, in real time, and by clicking the satellite pointer on these poles, you get a close-up shot of the type of aircraft approaching.

Clicking on your own bases brings up an information panel which you'll use to issue orders to the planes and equipment at that location. After they're activated, planes can be ordered on patrol, circular sweeps, anti-armor strikes, and interception missions. Air combat is resolved automatically by the computer, based on ratings of the planes involved.

Once your radar has located crucial targets, you can send repeated bombing runs with the auto-launch option. Should your country or alliance be fortunate enough to have cruise missiles, you'll have an easier time knocking out the enemy's hardened ground targets.

As in the real world of high-tech military might, missions expend precious resources that aren't easily replaced. Your job is as much about managing these limited resources as it is about planning offensive missions. This is the real Nintendo war.

NOT RATED

Impressions, 7 Melrose Dr., Farmington, CT 06032, (203) 676-9002; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA/SVGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $59.95

ALONE IN THE DARK

Alone in the Dark is a peek at the future of interactive entertainment. This creepy 3-D haunted house game is a ground-breaking leap forward in computer games and a real innovation in action/adventure gaming.

The big news is that IMotion uses an innovative combination of three-dimensional polygon-based graphics and conventional bit-mapped computer illustrations to create the most believable fantasy milieu ever seen in a computer game. Your character, too, is constructed of 3-D polygons and strolls about with surprisingly lifelike, fluid movement.

You play a male/female (your choice) investigator driven to ferret out the subterranean secrets of a spirit-infested mansion. With occasional moans, howls, and a brooding musical score piercing the silence and adding to the thrills, exploring this dimensional domain of spirits is a totally engrossing experience. As you wander from hall to horror, the camera-style angle showing your point of view changes to provide what the computer perceives to be the best perspective on your character and environment.

The puzzles are challenging, sometimes brutally tough, with an occasional real-time spin put on them as a monster gets on your tail. If you aren't fast enough, you'll die in a few moments of blood-splattered violence.

Learning to control your character is a tad troublesome at first. Since movement is limited to forward/backward motion and left/right rotation, you have to navigate a course through the house while keeping the character's orientation in mind. And because the camera angle regularly changes point of view as you traipse through a location, figuring out which cursor key to press can be a dizzying experience.

Players comfortable with more conventional graphic adventures will be swept away by the excitement of this game. With a high sense of drama and atmosphere, state-of-the-art 3-D graphics technology, and some real knuckle-gnawing puzzlers, Alone in the Dark is one of the must-play games of the year.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

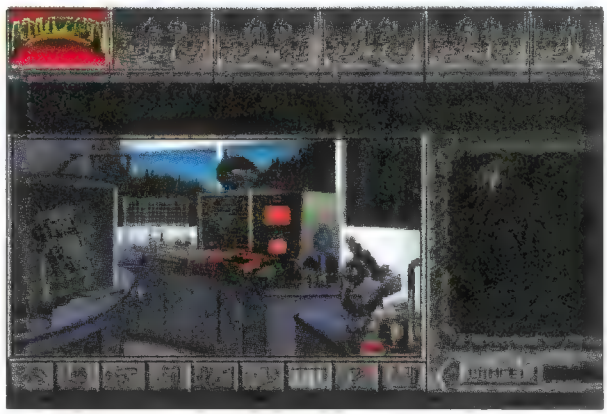
IMotion, 1333 Ocean Ave., Santa Monica, CA 90401, (310) 576-1885; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster recommended); 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.1 or later; $59.95

AMAZON

At its best, **Amazon: Guardian of Eden** is as lush and unspoiled as the heart of the Brazilian rainforest – with a dozen species of fun beckoning to you from the trees, a poison puzzle

under every rock, a hundred deaths waiting as you search for solutions. It stands with the finest examples of the role-playing game genre.

And yet, the outskirts of this rainforest seem to have been sacrificed a bit during development. Although the game itself is undeniably charming, some of its mechanics leave much to be desired.



You'll have a slick interface to help when you go adventuring with Access Software's Amazon.

Mix a few fragrant echoes of Indiana Jones; add All-American boy, blonde squeeze, and badnick South American colonel; toss in assassins, death squads, cannibals, and some very hungry fish, and you get Amazon, Access Software's enormously entertaining game.

You don't see just the usual side views, but overhead views, look-down-from-an-angle views, and first-person views. You'll pilot a plane in trouble, paddle a canoe in a rock-laden jungle river, and find yourself at the mercy of a giant red ant. There are cooperative two-character puzzles, races against time, and elaborate arcade sequences.

Screens are drawn with nuance and gorgeous color, but during conversations, animated digitized portraits of actors assume the roles, appearing in windows and speaking at least a couple of lines aloud.

Although Amazon is broken into 14 episodes, many aren't self-contained. You may not need items from one section until several episodes down the road.

Access touts its Super VGA support prominently on the package. To be sure, the images are sharp – more like looking at a set of snapshots than computer-game graphics. But SVGA doesn't really add anything to the experience and may even detract from it. Some speed is sacrificed, the play screen occupies a quarter of the screen, tiny items are now infinitesimal, and the mouse suffers from a certain flakiness.

Amazon is more playable – and still absolutely scrumptious-looking – in standard VGA. And the game, my friends, is superb.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Access Software, 4910 West Amelia Earhart Dr., Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (800) 793-0073; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM, 540K free; VGA (Super VGA recommended); supports AdLib, Roland MT-32, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, and Sound Source; mouse required; $69.95

AMBUSH AT SORINOR

Try your hand at some mercenary action, fantasy-style, in Mindcraft's new **Ambush at Sorinor**, another episode in the continuing Magic Candle series, one of the most tightly plotted and well-conceived fantasy lands in the PC universe.

Sorinor is a devastated land, fought over fiercely by six feuding clans. Although each group has tentative alliances with a few of the others, none would weep if the rest sickened and died a lingering death. Since the chances of plague are slim, you've been recruited to perform the necessary death rites.

Each of the clans simultaneously makes you a proposal: *X* amount of gold for a specific mission against one of the clans. You get to choose the mission you'll accept, then take a down payment to purchase the warriors and the weapons necessary to win. The rest of the money is pure profit, assuming you succeed and survive. Part of your job in Ambush is to balance income against expenditures.

There are more than a hundred character types in all, each with its own speed, weapon, armor, attack, and defense ratings. You can also purchase eight different kinds of traps, from simple holes to fireballs and magical explosives. As mercenary leader, you remain safely off the field, observing the battle and directing your troops from an overview map.

If you're successful, your employer pays the rest of your fee. If you fail, the rest of your fee is forfeit, and no one is thrilled.

Ambush at Sorinor is an attractive, cleverly designed game. The button bar symbols are well chosen, and substitute keyboard hotkeys are available for most commands. Three levels of zoom give you different degrees of battlefield detail, and there are plenty of missions to choose from. You can also construct your own. It may lack the degree of personalization that marks the best fantasy role-playing titles, but we'll wager that the strategic concerns of Sorinorian warfare will have you returning time and again to the six clans.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Mindcraft, 2291 205th St., Suite 201, Torrance CA 90501, (800) 525-4933; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz or faster recommended); 640K RAM (2MB extended memory recommended); DOS 3.3 or later (DOS 5 or later recommended); VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster sound boards; $69.95

AMERICAN GLADIATORS

GameTek's video-game version of **American Gladiators** offers seven of the television show's most popular

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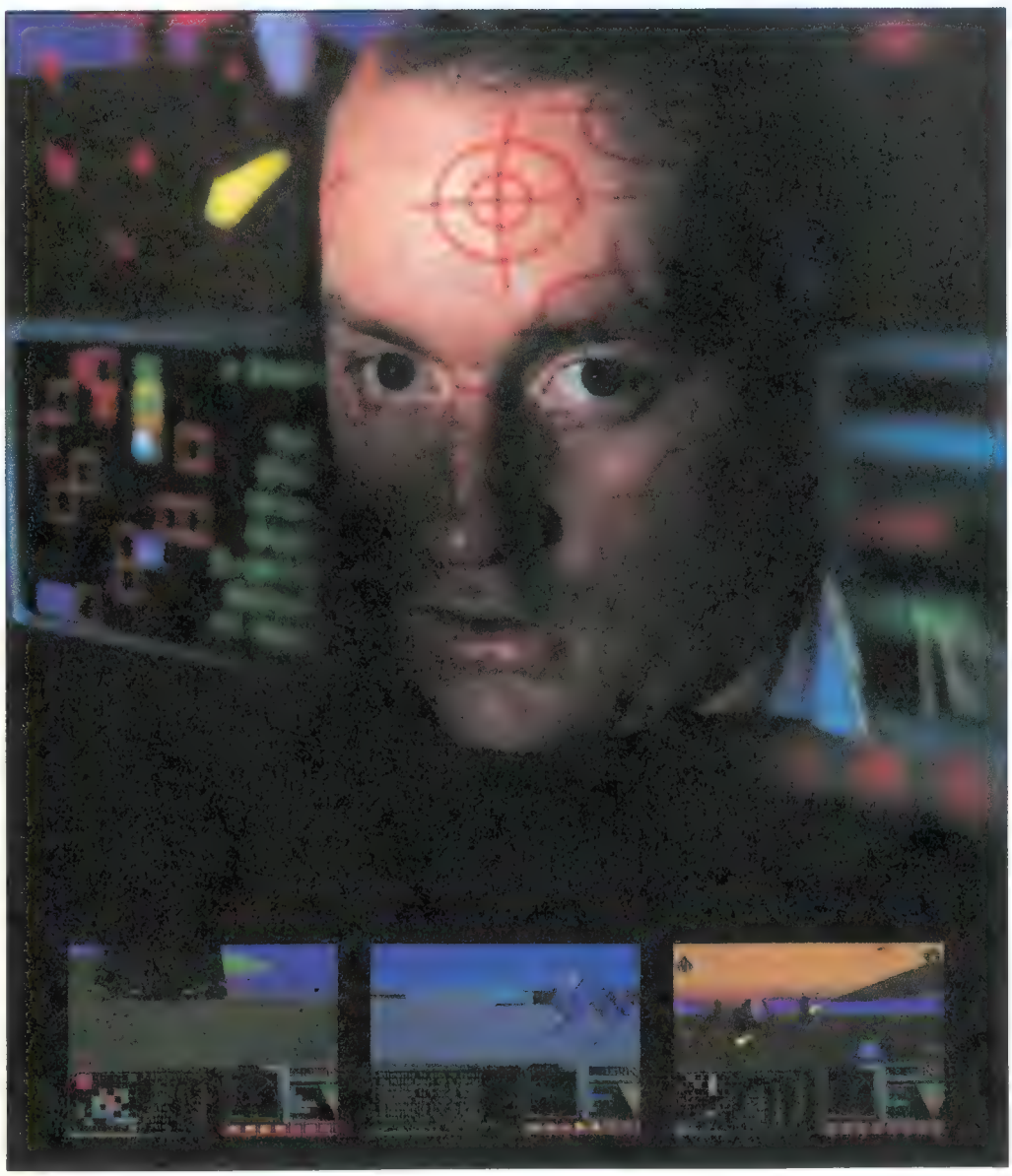

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*Here's the fine print. GEnie multi-player games and support services are $3.00 an hour in non-prime time: 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. local time Mon.-Fri., all day Sat. and Sun. and selected holidays. There's also an $8.95 monthly subscription fee. Each month, you'll get credit for up to four hours of non-prime time usage. Any surcharges incurred apply to all hourly usage, including your first four hours.

SIMUTRONICS CORPORATION

events. While GameTek hopes to attract the arcade gamer, American Gladiators will appeal primarily to fans of the boob tube.

None of the game's seven events lasts more than a minute, and most are boring exercises in joystick twitching. You can play against up to seven people, or a friend in a head-to-head option, but one of you must use the keyboard.

In Joust, armed with a pugil stick and balanced atop a pedestal, you must knock out your gladiator opponent. In Powerball, you try to slam-dunk balls into baskets while avoiding the roving gladiators. Atlasphere places you, your opponent, and two gladiators inside huge metal spheres, which you maneuver around like a gerbil on an exercise wheel. To score, you roll your sphere into sloped cups, which sets off a blast of theatrical smoke.

All the events in American Gladiators' remaining quartet, however, are fatally flawed. The Wall, a climb-and-chase event, is repetitive and mastered easily. Assault, in which you dodge air-powered tennis balls while trying to shoot a target, is also disappointingly easy. The Eliminator is nothing more than a glorified obstacle course.

The last event, the ludicrous Human Cannonball, has you swinging from a rope, trying to knock a padded gladiator off a pedestal.

For all its potential, GameTek's American Gladiators spends more time worshipping pop-icons than presenting solid game play. The VGA images are smooth, colorful, and interesting throughout, but the action simply rehashes ground that was broken years ago by numerous Olympic-style sports packages.

The events in TV's American Gladiators are offbeat and interesting, but GameTek's version reduces them to hackneyed revisions of late-'80s software. Send this Gladiator back to the dressing room for less make-up and more muscle.

NOT RATED

GameTek, 2999 Northeast 191st St., North Miami Beach, FL 33180, (305) 935-3995; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 2.1 or later; VGA/EGA; supports AdLib and Roland; $39.95

AN AMERICAN TAIL

Only a cruel cat can resist the charm of Fievel Mousekewitz, the furry star of the animated film *An American Tail.* Now, children ages seven and up can jump right into the Mousekewitz saga with Capstone's **An American Tail.**

As in the movies, this adventure revolves around Fievel's separation from his family as it journeys from the old country to New York City, and seeks a new life in the American West. The game begins at Immigration. From there, you use the keyboard, mouse, or joystick to help Fievel proceed from one scene to the next. This game's point-and-click interface couldn't be easier for kids to use.

Throughout, Fievel has a penchant for running into trouble or getting snagged by cats. But with your help, he can outsmart his captors by solving puzzles that include a concentration game, a shell game, a dots game, and a Simon Says game. Other challenges include the arcade-like Shoot-Out and a jigsaw puzzle depicting the Mouse of Minsk – mousedom's "seqwet veapon." The game's graphics resemble scenes from the movies, but An American Tail lacks the films' wonderful soundtrack.

Despite its many attractive features, An American Tail doesn't always measure up to its animated ancestors. You risk sanity trying to play the game from floppy disks, and playing from a hard disk drive is little better. You should be even less tolerant of the program's capitalization and apostrophe errors, misspelled words, and run-together sentences.

Ironically, while the game's scene changes can be painfully slow, some text frames disappear so quickly that even adults will have trouble absorbing everything. Also, some of the vocabulary is too advanced for seven-year-olds to comprehend.

An American Tail, the PC game, should win big with kids, thanks to the popularity and appeal of the movies. But while the computer version's storyline parallels Fievel's silver screen escapades, the program is a disk hog, hard drive installation is a chore, and the abundance of grammatical errors is unforgivable.

NOT RATED

Capstone, 14540 S.W. 136th St., Suite 204, Miami, FL 33186, (800) 468-7226, (305) 252-9040; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; MS-DOS 2.1 or later; EGA/VGA/ MCGA/Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Roland LAPC-1, SoundBlaster, and SoundMaster sound boards and Tandy sound; mouse or joystick recommended; $44.95

AMERICANS IN SPACE

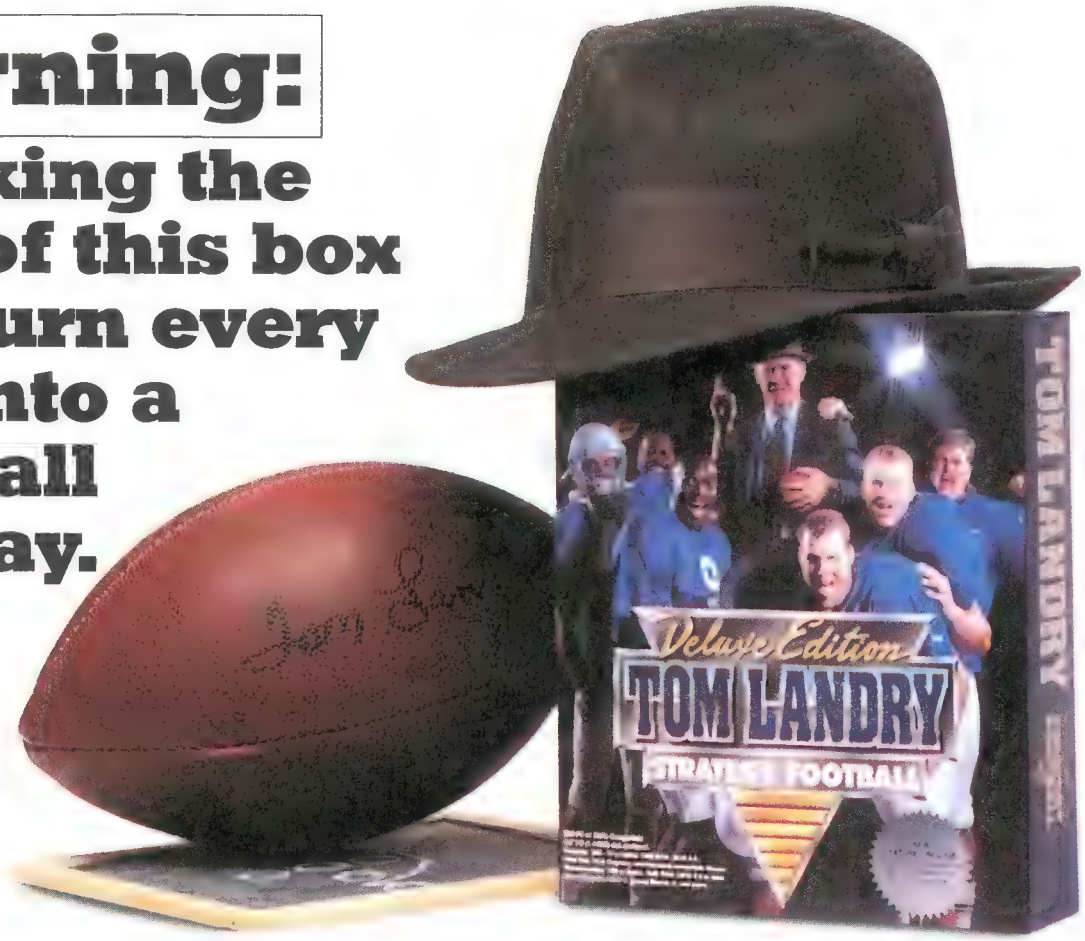
Americans in Space is a CD-ROM recounting of the most exciting adventure of the 20th century: our manned space program. This broad historical perspective includes over 500 photographs and more than an hour of full-motion video. This compact disc is a vivid, immediate introduction to America's ventures outside the atmosphere.

There are text descriptions of every manned space mission, often accompanied by photographs, narration, and, in many cases, lengthy video clips that let you relive events ranging from the first sub-orbital flight in 1961 to the many flights of the space shuttles.

In the Mission Control "room," you can click on buttons to select events by year, by NASA project, or by individual mission. When you select your topic, a green light appearing on any of a double row of icons indicates whether that topic includes text, video, a narrated slide

Warning:

Breaking the seal of this box will turn every day into a football Sunday.



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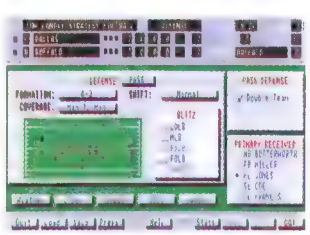

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show, mission factoids, and/or a photographic portrait of the mission crew. Clicking on any of the icons displays a menu of the available data. A green light on the on-screen telephone tells you that the topic also has some matching narration. The narrations run the gamut from lengthy descriptions to terse, anecdotal information that describes each mission. Finally, a Print icon lets you print out the entire text of the topic.

The other "room" of Americans in Space is devoted to five narrated slide shows that deal with more general topics: The Race to the Moon, Turning Points, Disasters, Living in Space, and Cruising the Planet.

While the interface is somewhat simplistic in appearance – most entertainment products these days have far more attractive and detailed visuals – the multimedia content of Americans in Space is exceedingly well done. The video clips are excellent, the narration quality is highly professional, and the accompanying graphics are clear and sharp.

The Americans in Space CD is more educational than entertaining, but the video of NASA's launches is terrific.

For the space enthusiast, this compact disc is a treasure chest of information and memorabilia. Whether you systematically work through its interlocking topics and images or just whistle-stop its contents, Americans in Space provides a stimulating voyage of discovery. A real voyage, too, not something dreamed by a restless game designer.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Multicom Publishing, Inc., 1100 Olive Way, Suite 1250, Seattle, WA 98101, (206) 622-5530; IBM PC or compatible (12MHz 386SX or faster); 2MB RAM; SVGA; MS-DOS 3.1 or later; Windows 3.1; requires CD-ROM drive; $69.95

THE ANIMALS

The Animals, a CD-ROM title from Software Toolworks, is a virtual visit to the zoo that entertains and educates. It's also one of the best multimedia programs for the PC yet.

The Animals is a multimedia CD-ROM package with clearly written text, beautiful photographic images, realistic sound, and impressive live-action video. All these elements are woven artfully into a well-designed interface.

This collection of images, sounds, and information from the San Diego Zoo effectively hands you a lifetime pass to one of the world's best animal parks. You see and hear the animals and watch them wander their habitats. Best of all, you can explore the exhibits in any order and at your own pace.

Guides are always available. Represented by text windows and audio speeches, they're clever and fun to follow. Although some of the guide passages are long and challenging, other text is written especially for children.

Another advantage: the creatures are always out and you always have a front-row seat. No standing in line, no peering over other shoulders. Even on a VGA monitor the still pictures are crystal clear and richly colored. The sound effects are just as impressive.

But video is what separates this multimedia compact disc from its cruder competitors on floppy. These videos are clear enough to convey the detailed beauty of the animals, though they occasionally decay into dots in small portions of the image.

It's almost impossible to get lost in this electronic zoo. In fact, The Animals offers an exceptional interface, one of the best around.

For all its quality, The Animals isn't quite flawless. One problem is that the movies, sound clips, text, and, pictures are organized by animals full names – *striped hyena* and *lowland gorilla,* for example. Unless you know the full name, you may have a hard time searching for the animals you want to see.

The real value of this compact disc is that it offers information in an entertaining way. Although it doesn't beat a real trip to the zoo, it has its advantages: You can explore in your own way, at your own speed.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Software Toolworks, 60 Leveroni Ct., Novato, CA 94949, (415) 883-3000; IBM PC or compatible; 1MB RAM; DOS 3.3 or later; VGA; supports ProAudio Spectrum and SoundBlaster; requires CD-ROM drive; $119.95

ARTHUR'S TEACHER TROUBLE

Arthur's Teacher Trouble, the second in Broderbund's Living Books series, is based on the popular book by award-winning children's author Marc Brown. This CD-based program – *interactive cartoon* might be a better description – helps youngsters improve reading and spelling skills as they explore a sound- and action-packed universe.

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PC MAGAZINE EDITORS' CHOICE April 27, 1993 Pro AudioSpectrum 16

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Most Valuable Peripheral Award,
PC/Computing, Dec. '92

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T. Yager, *Byte*, Dec. '92

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T. Carlton, *PC Games*, Mar. '93

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R. Lauriston,
PC World, Nov. '92

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D. English, *Compute*, Jan. '93

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W. S. Mossberg,
Wall Street Journal, Oct. '92

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J. Quain, *PC Magazine*,
Sept. '92

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Circle 35 on Reader Service Card

Brøderbund has cleverly transformed the story of mousy Arthur's interactions with his fellow third graders and with their taskmaster teacher Mr. Ratburn into a bilingual adventure that's fun for children and parents alike. From an easy-to-click main menu, you can have the story read aloud to your kids or you can play inside the story. Either way, real voices provide narration both in English or Spanish.

In "Read to Me" mode, the story proceeds scene by scene as the narrator tells the tale of Arthur's preparing for the school spellathon. As each word or phrase is spoken, the accompanying text is highlighted on the screen.

In "Let Me Play" mode, kids turn the page themselves by clicking on symbols at the bottom of the screen. They can also click on each word for review, or on one of the countless buttons or "hot spots" hidden in each scene. Click on a word or phrase, and the narrator pronounces it. Click on the story's characters, and they talk. But when you click on an object, it comes to life.

Digitized speech, surprise animations, movie-like sound effects, and musical clips bring a new dimension to an already appealing story. For enjoyment at or away from the computer, a printed copy of *Arthur's Teacher Trouble* is included in the somewhat oversized package.

Brøderbund's Living Books series continues with Arthur's Teacher Troubles.

Leap into multimedia – and Arthur's Teacher Troubles – you'll be happy you did.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Brøderbund Software, 500 Redwood Blvd., Novato, CA 94948-6121, (800) 521-6263, (415) 382-4600; IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); 4MB RAM; Windows 3.0 with Multimedia Extensions or Windows 3.1; SVGA; supports ProAudio Spectrum/16, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, and Thunderboard sound boards, and Tandy Sound; CD-ROM drive required; mouse required; $59.95

ASHES OF EMPIRE

Based on the recent events in Eastern Europe, Gametek's **Ashes of Empire** plunges you into the remnants of a superpower that's not only fragmented but faced with all-out war. You must fly in, gain a toehold, and try to assuage the fears of your embittered former foes. Pockets of military power exist, and until you know who has what, the best policy is to be nice to everybody.

Though steeped in the frightful possibilities of the Cold War meltdown, Ashes of Empire is still futuristic make-believe. You must stabilize a country by meeting people's need for food and clothing, and fuel and weapons. Then once peace is established, you bank off your success and tackle the next country.

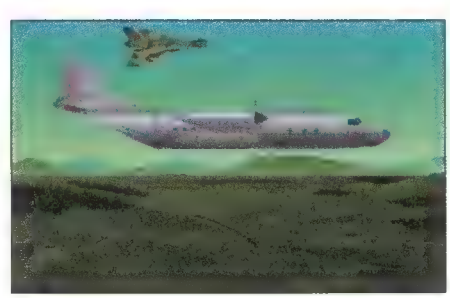
There are a lot of people here, each group with its own wants and needs, and each offering varying degrees of trust. In fact, over 6,000 unique characters will beg, borrow, and steal from you to get what they want.

Diplomacy requires conversation, and a lot of this game is spent talking. As dialog appears, you'll find out how you can help and determine who to make alliances with.

Information screens display surpluses and shortages of vital goods and equipment. Different cities have radar, hospitals, mines, and refineries. You can simply fill their needs from your supplies (expensive), or charm them into an alliance with the United Community (not easy).

It isn't all diplomacy, and you won't spend all your time delivering blankets and bandages. You also command forces composed of over 21 different military units, from jet fighters to tanks to submarines. A futuristic flight simulator constitutes your flying command headquarters, and confronts you with all the challenges of a typical flight sim. The mix is strange, and it doesn't always work.

If you like air combat, you'll get some with Ashes of Empire, but not enough to satisfy if you expect a full-fledged flight simulation. Nor does it quite gratify if you enjoy marshaling troops and strategic simulations. But Ashes of Empire provides the best way to get a feel for today's fragile world.



Ashes of Empire is a strange duck, an odd hybrid of flight simulator and strategy game.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Gametek, 2999 N.E 191 St., Suite 800, North Miami Beach, FL 33180, (305) 935-3995; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA/MCGA; DOS 3.0 or later; supports Roland and SoundBlaster; $59.99

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ATAC: THE SECRET WAR AGAINST DRUGS

In the year 2003 the United Nations asks you to eliminate Colombian drug operations and puts you in control of the Advanced Tactical Air Command (ATAC). MicroProse's **ATAC: The Secret War Against Drugs** aims to be more than just a typical fly-by-night sim. It lets you plan your missions and campaigns, too.

ATAC is something MicroProse calls a "strategic flight simulation." It's clearly a hybrid, for it combines wargame and flight-sim elements. You get to create missions, make tactical decisions, and then pilot the aircraft. But in the end, ATAC falls short. It does offer two satisfactory flight simulators – an F-22 Advanced Tactical Fighter and an AH-64A Apache Gunship – but they're wrapped in an average strategy game.

With potential targets in mind, you select the appropriate aircraft for the job, then arm them with a variety of weapons. You can choose any combination of four F-22s or Apaches for the mission you want. You tell your pilots where to fly and what to attack – but unlike with "shoot and forget weapons," games you have to monitor your aircrafts' progress and take control if necessary (at times the pilots are inept at finding their targets).

Another aspect of the game involves resupplying your agents. Here you drop off supplies to areas you want to investigate and assume that the good guys get them.

ATAC's tactics are on the basic side – essentially, you attack shipments. The game lacks more strategic targets, such as supply lines and gasoline depots.

As a flight simulator, ATAC is solid, and it's certainly up to MicroProse's standards. ATAC offers the requisite exterior, chase plane, and missile views, plus a graduated horizon in attractive graphics. In the digitized cockpit you'll find a Heads-Up Display (HUD), 3-D radar, and the basic controls.

ATAC, which sends you out on a search-and-destroy mission against drugs, isn't MicroProse's best effort.

For the average flight jockey, the game is satisfying. But for Top Gun flight-sim fans who play as hard as they fight, the flight simulators' lack of detail and the game's only adequate strategic elements make ATAC easy to fly right on by.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

MicroProse Software, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible; 1MB RAM; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; requires hard-disk drive; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; joystick recommended; $59.95

ATOMINO

Strange as it seems, **Atomino** combines dominoes and chemistry, then takes you down to the atomic level in a puzzling race against the clock. It may seem like a repeat of high-school Chem 101, what with jargon like valence and electron floating around, but in fact Atomino is almost as addictive as Tetris.

Atomino features a playing area in which you combine pieces provided from the top of the screen. Rather than work with the abstract blocks of Tetris, though, Atomino asks you to assemble real matter – atoms, complete with their valences – to create covalent bonds and, ultimately, molecules. Once that's done, the molecule vanishes from the screen and you start over.

Does that sound easy? It is at first, but as you get deeper, atoms come more rapidly and in an order that always seems exactly the opposite of what you need. You must react quickly and place your atoms strategically, because blunders can bury you quickly.

Atomino offers two play modes. In its *level-oriented* play, the computer gives you tasks such as building three molecules with seven atoms each. Each level gets progressively more difficult. In Atomino's *free-style* play, on the other hard, you simply build as large a molecule as you can in a quest for points. Free-style may sound easier, but because the atoms keep coming faster while you're trying to make a large molecule, there's often not much space available to play on the game board.

By virtue of its theme, Atomino flirts with being an excellent educational tool. Unfortunately, it stops short of that goal. The game's basic concept – making a puzzle game out of the building blocks of matter – has potential, but its designers obviously decided to limit Atomino to mere entertainment.

In the end, though, it's the game that matters. And Atomino is quite a game. *Addictive* is a good description. It's only through repetition that you really learn where to place atoms or gain a sense of the relationship between atoms and their placement on screen. Maybe alchemy isn't so tough after all.

NOT RATED

Psygnosis, 29 St. Mary's Ct., Brookline, MA 02146, (800) 438-7794, (617) 731-3553; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; CGA/EGA/VGA; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster; $49.95

BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR

Betrayal at Krondor, the first title in Dynamix's Riftworld Legacy series, isn't just another role-playing fantasy game, even though it's set in an oh-so-familiar, pseudo-Middle-Earth world. First off, Krondor was created by Raymond E. Feist, a successful fantasy writer, as an extension of his novels.

Usually, worlds created by programmers are more concerned with manipulating objects, not with plot.

Dynamix's Betrayal at Krondor is one of the best role-playing games to hit the shelves in the last two years.

Krondor's emphasis is on story, and the game is divided into chapters with each beginning in a short written introduction. The writing is excellent, and it succeeds in getting you in the right mood. It also makes for an original and exciting approach to fantasy role-playing.

Krondor's 3-D world is a smoothly scrolling polygonal landscape. It may lack Ultima Underworld-style caverns, but it provides plenty of hills, dungeons, and roads to make it come to life. The interface is another of Krondor's real strengths. Left-click to select anything, then right-click to find out information about the object. Or click-and-drag to move armor or weapons into use. It's just as easy to travel along Krondor's major roads and trails, since your party automatically turns when the road itself winds. In Krondor, you're free to roam wherever your adventurer's heart desires.

Krondorian combat, though, is a disappointment. It takes place on a two-dimensional field with a foreshortened perspective. You can defend, cast spells, move, or choose attacks. But, there's little trace of the revolutionary artificial intelligence which Dynamix claims.

There are only four statistical attributes in Krondor, but each character is also rated for a dozen skills, including weaponcraft, barding, and others. Attributes are hard to increase, though skills rise with use.

But Krondor's real weak link is its animation. Rotoscoped sequences that start each "chapter" are sometimes garishly lit. And whenever rotoscoped images are silhouetted against a bitmapped background in battle, the images don't quite match.

But that's saying the worst about Betrayal at Krondor. In the end, this story-oriented role-playing debut is top-notch, the stuff role-playing fans will want to pack on their PC's drive.

NOT RATED

Sierra/Dynamix, P.O. Box 978, Oakhurst, CA 93644, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster); 590K RAM, 2MB EMS; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, and SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive with at least 15MB free space required; mouse recommended; $69.95

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BLADE OF DESTINY

In **Blade of Destiny**, a first effort in Sir-Tech's Realms of Arkania series, the Teutons blitz into fantasy role-playing. Set in a pseudo-medieval Scandinavian world where cities war with each other, Viking pirates roam the seas, undead rise from their graves, and orc parties ravage everything in sight, Blade sends you on a quest to retrieve a lost, legendary sword. This is a well-balanced world where graphics run rampant. If Blade of Destiny is any indication of the rest of the series, Arkania's one to watch.

The first in the Arkania role-playing line, Blade of Destiny sports a first-person point of view.

Blade's battles are handled like a souped-up version of SSI's Gold series, though with much-improved sound and magic effects. Each party member shows as a highly distinctive, 3-D Super VGA figure on an isometric screen. So do the bad guys.

But when it comes to stats, Blade takes after Crusaders of the Dark Savant, good news certainly, because nothing fleshes out a group of adventurers like Sir Tech's elaborate statistics. The game provides seven areas of skill which govern 43 activities, including haggling, herb lore, and the ever-popular seducing.

This world's populated with nearly 80 spells, which unlike the magic in most games, aren't automatically effective. Magic casters are rated individually for each spell, and you acquire points to place against spells, gradually increasing their success rate and effectiveness.

Blade of Destiny won't win any awards for its plot, which is a simple series of quests. But it's nice to find documentation like this: thorough, clever, elaborate, and the best in the business. And some parts of Arkania can stand improvement. Mouse controls are awkward, with no hotkeyed menu selections in sight. There's no provision to print the elaborate stats or maps. And the standardized buildings and generic merchant screens don't supply Arkanian cities with personality.

Still, it's refreshing to play a game where higher experience levels don't invoke the comic book syndrome of super-heroes versus super-villains. With a second release already scheduled, The Realms of Arkania series is definitely worth following. And worth playing.

NOT RATED

Sir-Tech Software, P.O. Box 245, Ogdensburg NY 13669, (315) 393-6633; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.1 or later; supports Roland and SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $59.95

BLOODSTONE

Say goodbye to some old friends, and bid adieu to the lands of Deruvia, home to Mindcraft's Magic Candle epic. **Bloodstone** is the fourth and last in this series.

Set hundreds of years before its three companions, Bloodstone concerns a particularly nasty fratricidal war that has nearly doomed the once-proud dwarven race. You begin the tale as Danat, sole survivor of a clan that has recently been massacred by rampaging Deruvian monsters. Accompanied by a trio of friends, you venture forth to locate Khamalkhad, the legendary dwarven axe, and use it to unite the feuding Morin and Tamar clans.

The strengths and weaknesses of the Magic Candle system remain in place. Its excellent 256-color VGA graphics, for instance, can't make up for the game's old-fashioned, top-down view of an iconized universe. Although you can see interesting objects throughout Bloodstone's town shops and abandoned ruins, almost nothing can be touched, used, or claimed. Also, there's no music in Bloodstone, and its sound effects are unimaginative.

Once past the audio and video, Deruvia comes to life. Its magic system is well-developed, with 42 diverse and effective spells. Battle options are simple – move or attack – but there are axes, crossbows, and swords to choose from, each with its own potency. Ten different herbs temporarily enhance abilities, both in and out of combat.

Each of your characters boasts 9 major attributes and 18 skills. The attributes govern such matters as physical strength, bravery in battle, and the amount of time it takes to learn spells. Skills include archery, lock picking, and carpentry.

The best aspect of Bloodstone, however, is its long, involved, well-written quest: a search for many objects, magic words, prisoners, and stalwart heroes through ruins, towns, vast con-

Say goodbye to the Magic Candle role-playing line – Bloodstone is the fourth and final episode.

tinents, and islands. You'll make friends, gain wealth, travel everywhere for free, and face innumerable, vicious foes.

Bloodstone proves that although the Magic Candle series may have outlived its star quality, there's still a lot of kick in the old engine. Dedicated role-playing fans won't want to miss out on this one. Farewell, old friend.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Mindcraft, 2291 205th St., Suite 201, Torrance CA 90501, (800) 525-4933; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.3 or later; mouse recommended; $39.95

BLUE FORCE

Tsunami's **Blue Force** is a topnotch graphic adventure game drawn from the real-life experiences of game designer Jim Walls, a 15-year veteran of the California Highway Patrol. Much like his earlier Police Quest efforts for Sierra, Blue Force begins as an exercise in police procedure, gradually shifts into detective mode, and ends up as an intense, action-oriented crimebuster.

As rookie police officer Jake Ryan, you start this adventure and your first day on the job at the same time. Even so, an unresolved murder plagues your past, for your mother and father (also a policeman) were brutally and mysteriously killed a decade before.

The game begins with routine but tense encounters. And during your day-to-day work, you begin to gather evidence that puts you on the trail of a nefarious international arms dealer and begins to weave together threads of your parents' mysterious murders.

As you'd expect from a Jim Walls game, following proper police procedure is an important key to survival here. Failure to play it by the book always results in biting reprimands from your colleagues, if not a bloody, bullet-riddled death.

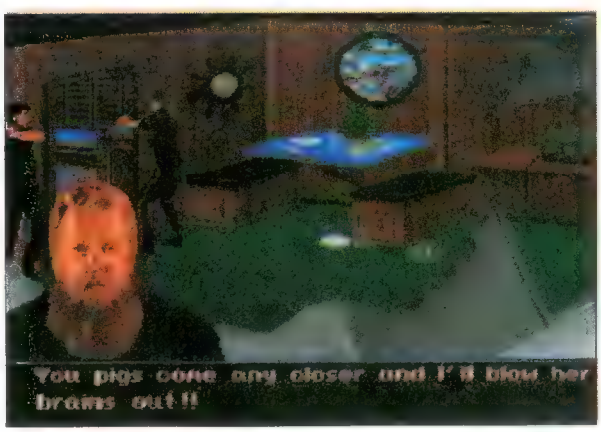
Thanks to its mouse-driven interface, Blue Force is an easy pick-up. Simply scroll across this panoramic map, pick a destination, and point and click to cruise to the scene of a crime. The radio is as easy to operate – you enter one of ten police radio codes. Even inventory management is a snap in Blue Force.

Blue Force features excellent digitized graphics and smooth animation. The photo-realistic graphics augment the violence quotient, which starts out high. Squeamish gamers and young children should stay away.

Blue Force is an intriguing game that draws you into police work, and makes an effort to put you into a police officer's mindset. If you've ever had a notion to hit the streets with the men in blue, now you can try it – safety behind the shelter of your PC.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Tsunami Media, P.O. Box 790, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (209) 683-8266; IBM PC or compatible (16Mhz 386SX or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, external General MIDI, Roland, and SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive with at least 10MB free space required; mouse required; $69.95



Created by the designer of Sierra's Police Quest series. Blue Force is another cops-and-robbers adventure game.

Advertisement

THE BURNING MUST STOP. NOW!

The world's rain forests are burning. And a wealth of wildlife is trapped in the fire's path.

Rain forests occupy just 2% of the earth's surface. Yet, these rain forests are home to half of the planet's tree, plant and wildlife species. Tragically, 96,000 acres of rain forest are burned every day.

You can help stop this senseless destruction. Right now you can join The National Arbor Day Foundation, the world's largest tree-planting environmental organization, and support Rain Forest Rescue.

When you join, you will help establish natural rain forest barriers to stop further burning and support on-site conservation management plans to protect threatened forests.

Each and every second, a rain forest area the size of a football field goes up in smoke. You'd better call now.

Rain Forest Rescue.

The National Arbor Day Foundation

Call Rain Forest Rescue NOW.
1-800-255-5500

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BOOM BOX

Whether or not you're a musician, you can use **Dr. T's Boom Box** to compose your own songs. As the documentation boasts, the program lets you "play hundreds of different sounds, add drums, bass, and synth patterns, then record your mix and play it back." Each of the three different screens you can access – Boom Box, Remix, and Jam – provides musical patterns that serve as a base.

In the Remix or Jam modes, you can slow down the tempo to as little as a grindingly slow 39 beats per minute, or speed it up to a chaotic 399 beats per minute. You can also adjust the pitch, create loops and repeats of particular riffs, play around with "solo pads," and add any of the dozens of oddball rap sounds to your songs.

Boom Box's basic Boom Box screen is designed to look like a real one complete with a cassette, two virtual speakers, and volume sliders that let you kick up the sound. All three screens offer those staples of boom box design: Record, Play, Stop, Pause, Rewind, and Fast Forward. Remix and Jam screens look like crude kiddie-soundboards and include the drums/bass/synth/solo sliders, solo pads, controls for repeats and loops, and FX buttons that activate sound effects.

Ultimately, Boom Box is mildly entertaining – but also cheesy. Whatever you come up with sounds like computerized instruments playing computerized rap riffs based on repetitive patterns. There's not too much that's natural about the program, although it does allow you to record your own sounds with a sampling program that can be loaded into Boom Box.

No, Boom Box won't make a musician out of you. And if you're already a musician, you've probably got other tools that are far more useful. But if you're into sound noodling, often daydream about becoming a rap/hip-hop artist, or like to pretend you're a big-time record producer, check it out.

NOT RATED

Dr. T's Music Software, 124 Crescent Rd., Needham, MA 02194, (617) 455-1454; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, ProAudio Spectrum, and Thunderboard; hard-disk drive required; mouse and/or joystick required; $49.95

BUZZ ALDRIN'S RACE INTO SPACE

Interplay's **Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space** is a simulation that tracks the U.S.A.-U.S.S.R. battle for space supremacy. If you want to relive the salad days of the NASA, pack Buzz on your PC's hard disk drive.

You can't count Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space as a game or an educational program. Instead, it's a simulation that teaches as it entertains. Buzz is really about managing resources. Money, to be sure, is finite, and one of your chores is to spread it around judiciously, funding one program over another, "buying" astronauts, or developing necessary space hardware. Being the first to put a man on the moon and bring him home alive is the goal, and you can play either superpower.

Try your hand at running NASA in Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space, a top-flight simulation.

Using a graphics-heavy interface that relies on point-and-click, Buzz asks you to make the rounds of a burgeoning space complex. Buildings represent various elements of your space program, from research and development and astronaut training facilities to a vehicle assembly building and the launch towers themselves.

And you've got lots of decisions to make in Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space. Risk management is central to space operations, both in reality and in this simulation. A successful mission depends, in large part, on how safe everything is. You can bump up this level by additional research and development, but when you're pressed for time, you can take a chance.

You don't have to follow the traditional path to the moon. You can, if you want, lie low at first and build a two-man spaceship right off the bat, frantically spending money on the lunar program while letting the enemy hog the limelight with a bunch of orbital firsts.

To liven things up, Buzz depends on first-rate sound effects and, for a non-CD title, some intriguing limited-motion video.

Buzz Aldrin's Race is a lesson in history impossible to duplicate in print, on film, or in a board game. This one-of-a-kind simulation deserves attention.

NOT RATED

Interplay Productions, Inc., 17922 Fitch Ave., Irvine, CA 92714, (714) 553-6678; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; $69.95

CAR & DRIVER

You are what you *drive*, the car makers like to say. Scary. That means most of us are stodgy, slow, gutless, and waiting to fall apart in a cloud of

rust. But if you are what you *play*, you can do better.

Adding fuel to and increasing the horsepower in the computer car wars, Electronic Arts' new **Car & Driver** is a simulation that features excellent action and superb graphics. Car & Driver features 10 cars and several well-known stretches of asphalt, including New York Highway 97 and California Route 1.

Of course, the real reason you'll want to play Car & Driver is to experience muscle-bound driving machines that are out of reach for most of us. Car & Driver offers up a mixture of present-day stock rockets and old time classics, including the Porsche 959, Toyota MR2, Ferrari F40, and others. These are hardly your dad's Oldsmobile, and Electronic Arts has tried hard to bring each car's feel and handling characteristics to the simulation.

You can select any of several perspectives to watch the action, from the default driver's seat or a chopper's eye-in-the-sky to the view from a chase car. Driving while under the influence of an external view is a lot like rodding a high-speed radio-controlled car.

Graphics are well done and on a par with the best on the market. You get sound and fury along with these glorious graphics, thanks to engine noises and other effects, assuming you have an audio board. Controls are straightforward and easy to use. As with most racing simulations, they get touchy at high speeds.

Car & Driver gives you the sights and sounds of power motoring, without the grease, oil, crushed fenders, and exorbitant insurance premiums. For automotive enthusiasts, when you wish upon a car in Car & Driver, your dreams can come true.

NOT RATED

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible (20 MHz or faster); 640K RAM (extended memory recommended); VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive required; joystick recommended; $59.95

THE CARL LEWIS CHALLENGE

The Carl Lewis Challenge from Psygnosis is a British import that is, as you'd expect, long on running. The challenge is to take a group of athletes through training and competition in five events – high jump, long jump, 100-meter sprint, 110-meter hurdles, and javelin throw – and win gold.

In training you develop each athlete's basic conditioning — no matter how fast you move your mouse in the arcade event, they'll go no faster than they're trained to do. You decide which exercises your athletes will concentrate on, how often they train, and at what intensity. Strength and agility are required to compete in the javelin; speed suffices for an athlete destined to run the 100-meter dash. Weekly reports indicate whether an athlete's training has improved his or her speed or agility, power, and stamina. Over-training works against you, and you've got to constantly remember that training a medal-winning hurdler differs from what you'd do with a javelin chucker.

If your training program works, some of your athletes will qualify to compete in their events. This is the arcade section of the game, where your own "athletic" skills are required. You move the mouse or joystick, or pound keys on the keyboard, to control an athlete's speed, rhythm, and action.

Except for the title sequence featuring digitized action photos of Carl Lewis, this game's graphics fail to capture the realism expected in today's PC sports titles. All the screens in Carl Lewis Challenge look like a light bulb marquee and don't come close to what's possible in VGA.

Carl Lewis appears to give you help by suggesting exercises for your athletes and techniques you can work on for the arcade portion of the game. And the action replay may help you spot your mistakes, or allow you to relive moments of glory.

The Carl Lewis Challenge has its moments, and you might even learn something from it about training, but the game lacks exciting Olympic-style computer fun.

NOT RATED

Psygnosis, 29 Saint Mary's Ct., Brookline, MA 02146, (617) 731-3553; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; $49.95

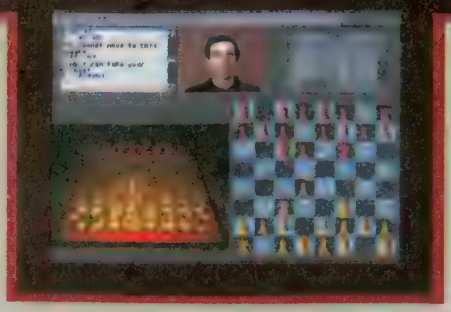
CARRIER STRIKE

SSI's **Carrier Strike** assigns you the critical role of commanding WWII Naval forces in the Pacific campaign, the first and only war in which carriers fought other carriers.

You can play either side in the war's most famous engagements, from the critical Battle of Midway to lesser-known scraps like the Battle of Santa Cruz. Like a real admiral, what you're doing is managing resources, which in this case are historically accurate collections of ships, planes, and men.

Before you engage the enemy, though, you have to find him. Each Carrier Strike mission may put your ships in the middle of the action, but that action begins in a nail-biting, hide-and-seek fashion. As each day's dawn breaks you must find the enemy. It's a good idea to launch early-morning search missions from your flattops.

Flight deck control is the heart of Carrier Strike. From here you move squadrons of planes out of the hangers, fuel and arm the aircraft, and raise them to the deck for launching. When your search planes get a good look at the enemy task forces, you'll need to carefully select effective squadron complements for the job. Of course, once you see the enemy, they're likely to fix your position, too. You'll want to put Combat Air Patrols

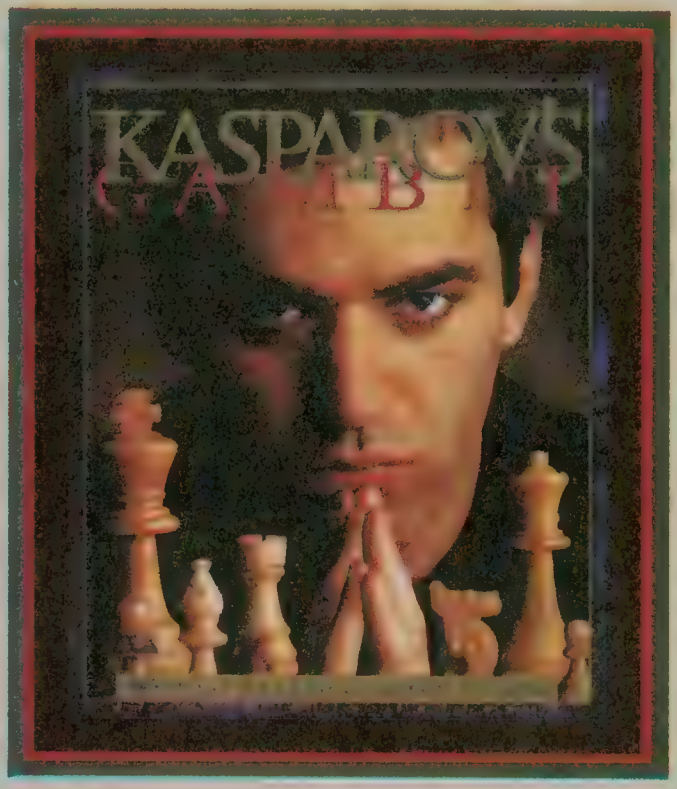


To read Kasparov's mind, simply refer to the second board.

[BEFORE]

Ready to raise your game to a higher level, are you? Meet Garry Kasparov, reigning king of the chess world. And your new private tutor.

While you play Kasparov's Gambit, **his digitized image and voice** (Russian accent and all) will appear on your screen. He'll warn you of imminent danger. Question the tactics you use. And constantly challenge you to seek out fresher and deadlier lines of attack.

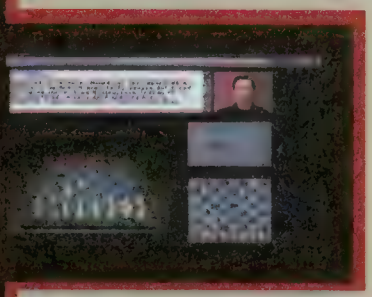


There's even **a second board,** which allows you to **visualize the strategies** Kasparov suggests. You can also customize most aspects of your opponent's game, giving you a virtually **infinite pool of challengers.**

To make sure you don't outgrow Gambit any time soon, we power it with the very same engine that **won** the 1993 International Computer Chess **Championship.** Not exactly what you'd call a pushover. So pick it up. Play it. And who knows?

After spending a few weeks or so learning the ropes from Kasparov, you may just find that you're finally ready to take on, well, Kasparov.

[AFTER]



As you improve, you can customize opponents to suit your game.

Kasparov's Gambit is a trademark of Electronic Arts © 1993 Heuristic Software. All rights reserved.

YOU DON'T BECOME WORLD CHAMPION OVERNIGHT. IT MAY TAKE YOU A COUPLE WEEKS.

Gambit's engine won the world title, so watch your step.

ELECTRONIC ARTS®

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(CAP) above your ships to keep enemy bombers off your back.

Long on simulation, Carrier Strike is short on graphics, providing only the standard SSI icon pieces. The computer can generate an infinite number of battles and can play either or both sides. Unlimited hypothetical battles further increase the replayability of the game.

You'll need to maintain high standards of team management, make precise moves, and fly skillfully to operate aircraft safely from shipboard, particularly at night and in bad weather. Carrier Strike is a rich simulation that first reflects these conditions, then challenges your command skills.

NOT RATED

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $69.95

CARRIERS AT WAR

Carriers at War puts you in the commander's chair for six crucial battles in the Pacific – from Pearl Harbor and Coral Sea to the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot. You have a lot of responsibility, but your orders are simple – seek out and destroy enemy carriers before they do the same to you.

Strategic Studies Group has put a lot into this game to make sure it takes a lot out of you. You control the naval and air forces of either side in the Pacific, but the most important decisions you make are those that involve carriers, the queen of the seas.

In Carriers at War, you do more looking than seeing, even as you play the grand-scale Midway scenario. But when you do find the enemy, all hell breaks loose.

The only thing animated in Carriers at War is your mouse rolling on its pad. Its VGA graphics include colorful action stills with each order screen, and the surface-combat display shows an overhead view of your task force. You'll play most of this simulation from maps on the orders screen, where you point and click ship icons to issue orders to move, refuel, or launch air operations.

Detailed information on individual ships includes dimensions and displacement, and armor and armament. But you can't do anything to an enemy you can't see, so the first order of business is to get some planes in the air. In time you'll receive sighting reports, but sightings from WWII carrier-based planes were notoriously unreliable.

Carriers at War's combat resolution takes numerous factors into account, and a dynamic damage system depends, at least in part, on the quality of each ship's damage-control crews.

This game is a superb simulation of the awesome carrier battles of WWII. The reality of war figures prominently in the performance of the various task forces in the game – but go ahead, be daring. Play the Allies at Pearl Harbor. Maybe you can surprise the enemy this time.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strategic Studies Group, 8348 Monticello Dr., Pensacola, FL 32514, (904) 494-9373; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; mouse required; $69.95

CLASH OF STEEL

Maybe you wanted to try your hand at a PC war game, but you've been spooked by the genre's inherent complexity. If that's the case, SSI's latest, **Clash of Steel,** may be worth a look. Containing one complete campaign and six scenarios, Clash of Steel lets you revisit the entire European Theater of World War II in all its detailed complexity.

The main screen shows a tactical section of the overall board, and you can easily move from zone to zone or bring up the entire playing field with the mouse. Combat forces appear as squares, each color-coded to represent its allegiance. Apparent at a glance are each unit's strength and the action points available per move. Clash of Steel's graphics and use of color are agreeable, but they somehow feel more like EGA than VGA.

Refight World War II in Clash of Steel, a war game for combat rookies.

As in any war-time simulation, the action lies in managing and deploying your units to build power, destroy enemies, minimize your losses, and take the opposition's territory. The computer first calculates production values for both sides, then during your turn, you make your moves.

The Assault option initiates ground combat and lets you select adjacent friendly units to aid your attacks on a nearby enemy unit. The ability to combine units in enemy attacks ups your hit percentage, and long-range attacks are possible via Air Strikes and Shore Bombardments. Elemental conditions such as terrain and weather are also taken into account.

Tactical maneuvers help units increase supplies and production values, and this lets you buy additional land, air, and naval units. Research points can be allocated among various areas, such as jet planes or rockets. And when combat's finally joined, sound effects – including bombs and

SEE JACK RUN.
SEE JACK PLAY.
SEE JACK WHEEL.
SEE JACK DEAL.
SEE JACK STEAL.
SEE JACK PAY TAXES.
OR NEVER SEE JACK AGAIN.

Meet Jack Ladd, a jack of all trades, most of them illegal. Jack's in big trouble. You see this is the future and now the IRS has the right to use deadly force to collect taxes. Guess what Jack, the tax man commeth, and they're looking for the gazillion bucks you owe them. Now you have only 28 days to get them the money, how you do it is up to you.

Join Jack as he cons and coerces his way through the backstreets and alleys on the seedy side of the galaxy. Eight-way scrolling, full perspective scaling and Hypertext-style interaction give this game a colorful and realistic edge. This unusual adventure captures your imagination and thrusts you right into the heart of Jack Ladd's bizarre world.

If you can't find this game at your favorite retailer call: (800) 438-7794 (GET PSYG) to order your copy today.

Psygnosis
675 Massachusetts Ave.
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 497-7794

Innocent is available on IBM compatible and Amiga formats.

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machine gun fire – give a bit of spice to the strategic.

Clash of Steel proves a worthy introduction to wargames.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM (4MB recommended); VGA; supports SoundBlaster and SoundBlaster Pro; mouse recommended; $69.95

COBRA MISSION

Part *Debbie Does Dallas*, part Japanese cartoon, part pure smut. That's Megatech's **Cobra Mission**, a sexually graphic role-playing game that carries an over-18-only rating slapped on by the publisher.

Cobra Mission appeals to those with raging adolescent hormones or to adults still stuck in adolescence. But much of it won't appeal to anyone.

Here you travel around Cobra Island in a low-resolution, Nintendo-style map flush with houses, shops, and bars, learning what you can by walking up to the locals and reading their dialog boxes. This isn't state-of-the-art role-playing.

Combat is inevitable, and once you come upon an enemy, the screen changes to a graphic of your attacker. You must quickly place your weapon over a vital spot on the enemy's body by moving the mouse.

But the real reason why boys will play Cobra Mission is to get to the girls, since sexual encounters are the rewards for success. You and the girl go to a hotel room where progressively more revealing screens and steamy dialog encourage your desire.

It gets even weirder, for you pick tools for your love-making chores. Select hands or lips, and the cursor changes into like-minded icons that you then place on a part of the woman's digital body. This combination of arcade-style sex and changing cursor is rude, crude, and mean-spirited.

Losing something in the translation, Cobra Mission's dialog is full of puzzling grammatical errors and hilarious mistakes. The violence is gory and graphic, and the game itself, without the nudity, is less than challenging.

Geared for the immature, the unsophisticated, and the underaged the best advice is to pass on making passes at these faux women, then take a pass on Cobra Mission.

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Megatech, P.O. Box 11333, Torrance, CA 90501, (310) 539-6452; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster recommended); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, Pro AudioSpectrum, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, and Thunderboard; hard-disk drive with at least 11MB free required; mouse recommended; $79.95

COMANCHE MAXIMUM OVERKILL

Flying in from nowhere like an attack helicopter, NovaLogic changes the standard by which flight simulators are judged. Its **Comanche Maximum Overkill** helicopter simulation takes flight simulator graphics to new heights, flies where none have flown before, and sets a new 3-D standard that's up in the stratosphere.

In Comanche Maximum Overkill you're flying the next-generation Boeing Sikorsky RAH-66 Comanche Attack Helicopter through semi-realistic landscapes rendered with shading and textures to produce scenery unprecedented in any PC sim.

Comanche brings several other new aspects to flight simulator terrain, including snowlines, waterlines, shadows, treelines, vegetation, and lifelike clouds. According to NovaLogic, the ground terrain follows the laws of nature – if a hillside is too steep, vegetation won't appear,

Like most flight simulators, Comanche features a series of military missions to take out strategic targets, plus full campaigns. Of course, the enemy will be waiting in force and is willing to make every mission not just a job, but an adventure.

You'll be armed to the rotors with a variety of heat-seeking and laser-guided missiles, a cannon, and assorted rockets. You can transmit enemy position data to your ground artillery, and you have an assortment of chaff and flares for those necessary evasive maneuvers when something locks on your tail. In the under-construction version used for this review, a wingman flies by your side.

Like the real Comanche Attack Helicopter, the game provides computer-assisted flight to compensate for the rotor and throttle as you fly. Comanche also supports dual Thrustmaster joysticks, a first for helicopter simulations. The result is a more realistic duplication of actual helicopter controls.

Comanche really flies. The action is exhilarating and the terrain stunning. If NovaLogic can balance the incredible graphics with first-rate game play, it'll have a real winner.

NOT RATED

NovaLogic, 19510 Ventura Blvd., Suite 200, Tarzana, CA 91356, (818) 774-0600; PC or compatible (386 or faster); 4MB RAM; VGA; supports SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive with 10MB free required; $69.95

CONQUER FOR WINDOWS

Conquer for Windows is a strategy game of annihilation. You exterminate your opponents by capturing cities, land, and pieces on a board — in essence, winning control over the known world.

At first impression, Conquer looks identical to Empire Deluxe, except that it runs within Windows. A closer look, though, shows this to be as a simpler version, one that's easier to learn and play. Conquer for Windows

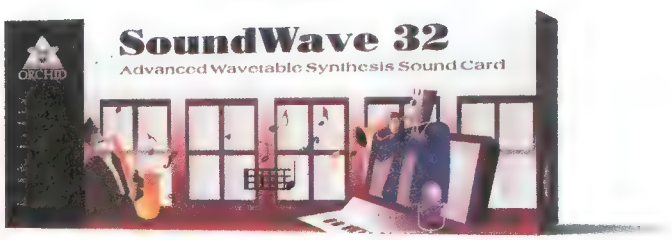
8-Bit.

Good.

16-Bit.

Better.

Signal Processor.



Infriggincredible

Fire up your favorite game and get ready to be blown away. Because now every sound you couldn't hear with those other boards is going to come storming out of your PC with intensity like you've never heard before. Introducing Orchid's signal processing SoundWave 32.

SoundWave 32 is nothing short of a revolution in sound, with its own rocket-quick RISC signal processing chip (DSP). While other boards try to stuff their puny sounds through slow, outdated FM chips, SoundWave 32's 20 megahertz signal processor rushes out rich, 16-bit sound. With incredible clarity and separation.

And there's more. Not only do you get dual CD-ROM interfaces and free stuff like stereo speakers, a microphone and a stereo cable, but SoundWave 32 also gives you amazing wavetable sampled sound. So when the game calls for a killer riff, you don't just hear a computer simulation of a guitar, you hear the real, recorded instrument.

Of course, SoundWave 32 is compatible with everything —SoundBlaster, AdLib, General MIDI, Microsoft Windows Sound System, and Roland MPU-401 MIDI Interface, and for you game players, Roland MT-32 sound module. And with just a simple change of software, its signal processor will handle any new sound format that comes along.

So if good isn't good enough, get crisp, signal processed sound and state-of-the-art wavetable technology, all for the price of the lesser boards. Get infriggincredible sound and value. Get SoundWave 32 from Orchid. To hear more, call 1-800-7-ORCHID today.

ORCHID

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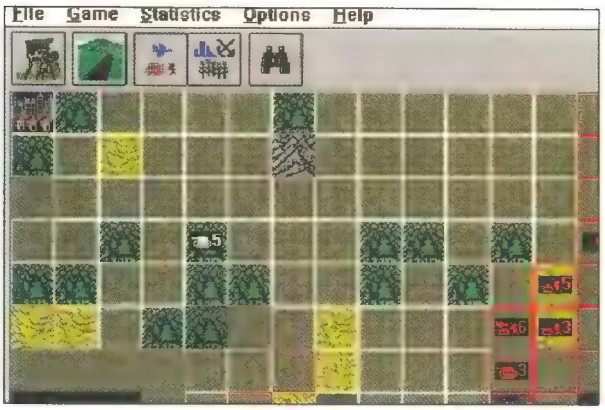


Conquer for Windows may be a rip-off of Empire, but it sure beats Windows' Solitaire.

also makes use of land for farming and mining purposes. The result is a strategy game that's only slightly different but that effectively stands on its own.

Throughout Conquer for Windows, each player takes turns moving pieces to capture territory, attack enemy forces and cities, and control the production of armaments. The game features elemental pieces – infantry, tanks, planes, and ships – that you move through Conquer's on-screen board.

As you'd expect, there's a hierarchy among the pieces. Each can move a certain distance per turn, each has its own defensive and offensive ratings in battle, and each takes a different amount of time to build. To attack, you merely move your piece into an area where your opponent's forces reside. Depending on the ratings, the computer determines the outcome.

In Conquer, you claim the good earth by moving your pieces onto a parcel. Land is valuable, as it provides food and raw materials to fuel your war machine. If you run out of food or materials, production in your cities comes to a standstill. To expand your operations, you can build cities. The more municipalities you have, the greater your production of military might, and the greater your consumption of food and raw materials.

Although it's hard to match the challenge of a real human opponent, Conquer's artificial intelligence puts up a good fight in ten levels of difficulty.

Conquer's graphics are colorful and well done, and its screens are attractive. The interface is easy to use, and the documentation is clear and well written. The game also offers sound effects and music. Conquer for Windows is an involving and entertaining strategy game, one that should appeal most to newcomers.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Elpin Systems, 45 S. Park Victoria, Suite 401, Milpitas, CA 95035, (408) 956-0720; IBM PC or compatible (80386 or faster); 4MB RAM; VGA; Windows 3.1 or later; supports Sound Blaster, ProAudio Spectrum, and Microsoft Sound System; hard-disk drive with at least 4MB free space required; mouse required; $69.95

CONQUERED KINGDOMS

QQP's **Conquered Kingdoms** is a strategy wargame set in a fantasy world where ogres roam and gargoyles play. But though Conquered Kingdoms features solid strategy and compelling game play, it could use a better generation of graphics.

Your goal in Conquered Kingdoms is to score points by occupying the castles and towns in a given territory. Natural resources – coal, wood, and gold – come first in this game. By occupying a resource on the map, you claim it for your own use.

At first the program lets you create your armies from a variety of soldiers and fantasy creatures. But resources are the key to recruiting troops later and to making weapons to strengthen your ranks.

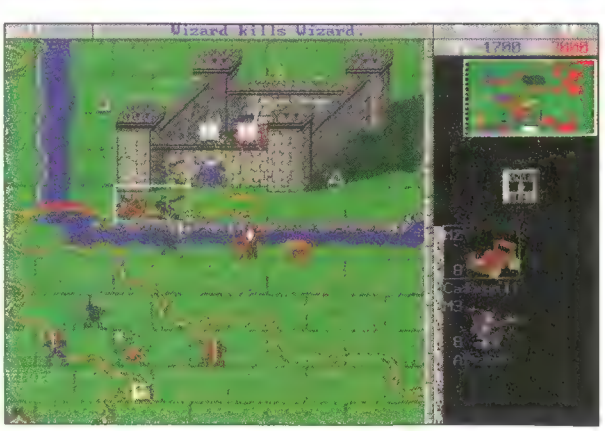
Throughout the game you command swordsmen, archers, knights, officers, and cavalry, along with fantasy units such as rogs, dragons, wizards, and others. Each piece carries a certain number of moves per turn according to the terrain. When you're within fighting range of the enemy, you'll engage in battle. Archers can fight from long distance, while foot soldiers must occupy the same square to slash it out. The computer determines the outcome of each individual skirmish.

You can choose to play against the computer, a worthy competitor, or against another player, either face to face or via modem. An intriguing alternative is to play by mail or e-mail using a special game file you send back and forth.

When compared with the strategy titles coming from other companies, Conquered Kingdoms is saddled with primitive graphics. In fact, the presentation is a throwback – not to the Middle Ages of gaming, but to PC games of some half-dozen years ago.

The software supports audio cards, but you're treated to tunes like "Ain't She Sweet" and "I'm in the Mood for Love." Can you see them as the foundation for, say, Conan the Barbarian?

But even simple graphics images and insipid music aren't enough



Simple graphics mar Conquered Kingdoms, a fantasy strategy game that looks and sounds primitive.

PAGAN

Ultima VIII™

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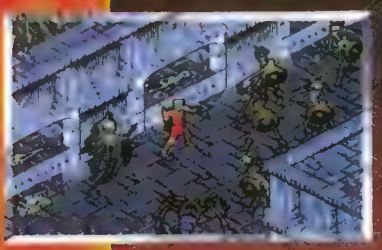

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Circle 4 on Reader Service Card

to destroy a solid strategy game. Conquered Kingdoms is an engaging turn at master planning without a high visual overhead.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Quantum Quality Productions, 1046 River Ave., Flemington, NJ 08822, (908) 788-2799; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 3.3 or later; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; mouse required; $59.95

CONTRAPTION ZACK

You have big problems when you take on the job of repairman at Gadgetco, Inc., because the factory is literally falling apart at the seams. Fortunately, Mindscape's **Contraption Zack** – a puzzle game for the methodical, the detail-oriented, and the exceedingly patient – holds together tighter than Gadgetco.

The factory is an enormous maze of interconnected rooms and levels that you must somehow traverse. An array of launch pads, gates, conveyor belts, and elevators awaits you and may or may not get you where you want to go.

There's no easy path in Gadgetco. Every room is a circuitous route through a variety of psychotically designed gates and passages. Doing things in the proper sequence is paramount. Getting around a seemingly insignificant obstacle may involve going back through three previous rooms to get to the next. From the moment you leave the reception area of Gadgetco, you've got to start pushing buttons, setting switches, and making repairs.

You don't have to depend on your bare hands, though. You have tools at your disposal, and you'll need them. Unfortunately, your predecessor left them strewn across the factory. As you move through the factory, you'll need newer and more elaborate tools to repair the "mishaps" you inevitably encounter. To repair a maladjusted hex nut, a loose screw, or a leaky pipe, simply walk up to the problem area with the proper tools, and the problem's solved. When you try to repair something for which you have no tool, the toolbox flashes. That's the starting signal for yet another tool hunt.

Contraption Zack is no simple stroll through a magical maze of machinery, nor is it a rapid-fire, reflex-testing series of levels with increasingly difficult hazards. While many of the rooms in Gadgetco require some adroit maneuvering and quick thinking, the focus is definitely on strategy. Plan on plenty of patience if you hope to succeed.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Mindscape, Inc., 60 Leveroni Ct., Novato, CA 94949, (415) 883-3000; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA/MCGA; DOS 3.3 or later; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive with approximately 3MB free required; joystick recommended; $39.95

CRUSADERS OF THE DARK SAVANT

Sir-Tech Software's **Crusaders of the Dark Savant** takes you out of the cave and into a huge and richly detailed world, above and below ground. Shimmering seas, dark caverns, and forest roads spread out before you in a 256-color VGA display.

You're on the planet Guardia, searching for the secrets of the wizard Phoonzang. But other races search for the same secrets. Your actions and choices form alliances and breed antagonism between your party of humans and the various aliens. How does the Dark Savant, a mysterious other-worldly being, fit in? Are you merely pawns? Do your control your own fate?

Science mixes with sorcery, and you'll encounter disgusting and sublime beings. As in Bane of the Cosmic Forge, Crusader's great strength lies in its management of non-player characters and the involved plotline your party must unravel. As before, you can talk to non-player characters, if you are so inclined, through the Infocom-like parser. Automapping has been added as well.

If you finished Bane, your start in Crusaders depends on the ending you reached in the prequel. Each start sets you up a bit differently, effectively making Crusaders several games within a game. The interface is a full point-and-click affair and includes a limited drag-and-drop capability too, as items can be dragged from one player to another.

Crusaders features an interesting storyline and one of the best-developed plot devices seen in a long, long time. The music and digitized sound effects, while realistic, can become tiresome. And the graphic engine, while providing wonderful images, still works in that *move-10-feet* reality, like Might & Magic III.

With well-balanced game play, an expansive world populated with fascinating characters, and a well-written epic, Crusaders is a role-playing experience that lets you walk through a complex milieu that has a life all its own.

NOT RATED

Sir-Tech Software, P.O. Box 245, Ogdensburg, New York 13669, (315) 393-6633; IBM PC or compatible (10MHz or faster); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; DOS 5.0 recommended; hard-disk drive required; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster, and Thunderboard; $69.95

THE DAGGER OF AMON RA

Shelve Nancy Drew! No mystery book character compares with Laura Bow – intrepid reporter, amateur sleuth, and naive Nellie. In **The Dagger of Amon Ra,** the second "installment" in the Laura Bow Mystery

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Circle 131 on Reader Service Card

Series, Sierra captures the spirit of the Roaring '20s in a murder mystery romp through the Big Apple.

Laura heads for New York and a job with the city's *Daily Register News Tribune.* Her first assignment is a real plum: investigating the theft of an Egyptian antiquity, the god Amon Ra's dagger, from the Leyendecker Museum. But what is it with this woman? As soon as Laura Bow appears on the scene, people start turning up dead!

Like a play, The Dagger of Amon Ra is scripted in six acts. The game's documentation advises you to "save early, save often" – good advice in almost any adventure or role-playing game, but especially important here. As Laura, you explore New York City's streets and neighborhoods, the Leyendecker Museum, and other colorful locales.

The Dagger of Amon Ra features the standard Sierra icons for moving around, looking at objects, talking to people, and picking up nifty items to stow in your purse. In addition to the usual icons, Amon Ra features a reporter's notebook – the names of new people, places, and things are entered automatically as you gather clues.

The near-perfect blending of sound effects, music, and graphics in Amon Ra adds up to artistry. Hand-painted scenery, realistic animation, and 3-D scaling lend an almost movie-like feel. And the game's soundtrack creates an authentic '20s ambience.

As you help Laura pursue all the news that's fit to print in this captivating whodunit, you vicariously witness what designer Bruce Balfour describes as "creative ways to kill people." But no matter how you slice it, Laura will live to drink another Moxie, and you may die laughing.

NOT RATED

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93644, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, Pro AudioSpectrum, Roland MT-32, SoundBlaster, Sound Source, and Thunderboard; hard-disk drive required; mouse recommended; $69.95

DARKLANDS

Darklands, Microprose's first venture into role-play, aims to provide the realism that's been neglected in the genre. For the most part, it succeeds splendidly.

Darklands is set in a real place in a real time – the greater Germany of the 15th century – and while some liberties have been taken for playability, the designers stuck delightfully close to their goal. No other game is so fully researched and still so unburdened by its sense of history.

For starters, there are no dungeons per se, though your party of four will set foot in some nasty town and country spots. Though there's many a quest to complete, Darklands doesn't depend on a defining plot device. You won't find an omnipotent demon or dark wizard, though there are lots of all-too-human, bad-tempered villains in the dark streets and thick forests. Also, there's no real end to Darklands, save death or retirement. Your goal is simple – survive and enhance your status.

The result is a kind of free-form play that lets you live a little – to go where you will, try what you want, and wander without fear of having to dot every last *i* or kill every last goblin.

Be prepared to read a lot. This is a literate game, in and of itself unusual these days. The many cities consist of interlocking text menus laid over pleasant time-and-place-sensitive backdrops. And during the real-time, animated combat, the meat of the game and a great deal of fun, Darklands goes in for a closeup at an isometric angle.

Darklands' details help to crank up the realism. The game emphasizes skills over attributes and puts more stock in endurance than hit points; it even manages to include reputations, so that as you play, people approach *you* with missions.

3-D hack-and-slashers are a copper piece-a-dozen. But Darklands is like absolutely *nothing* else.

NOT RATED

Microprose Software, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatibles; 2MB RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, and ProAudio Spectrum; mouse required; $69.95

DARKSEED

An artist dominates **Darkseed.** Not a programmer, not a designer, not a writer, but an artist. The surrealist painter H.R. Giger, known to both science-fiction and art fans, is most famous for his design of the alien in the movie of the same name.

Darklands isn't just the same old role-playing, for it's set in reality – the Middle Ages – not some weird fantasy world.

With stunning effect, Giger has put his lavish imprimatur on this adventure game. But art alone can't carry a computer game. So it is with Darkseed. Its mechanics look lost among the artistry. Still, this is an auspicious debut for Cyberdreams.

You begin the game as Mike Dawson, a writer who rents an old Victorian mansion. But instead of the creativity he

seeks, he receives a nightmare of an alien implanting an embryo into his skull. Dawson awakens with a headache – and only a few days to figure out what happened before the embryo sprouts like some twisted Athena from his skull and unleashes a reign of *Alien*-like terror on the unsuspecting world.

It turns out that the house contains a gateway to the Dark World, which is home to the Ancients. Dawson, represented in Darkseed by a nicely animated digitized figure, ventures into this alien world in a decidedly unsettling adventure as he tries to foil the Ancients' evil plans.

Darkseed uses yet another variation on the point-and-click, mouse-does-it-all interface and lets you cycle through three pointers: *move, use,* and *look.*

Unfortunately, some puzzles are less than logical and demand real hit-or-miss brawn, not problem-solving brains. Other constraints include the short time you have in which to solve the mystery and a needless pixel hunt for objects.

Darkseed can be difficult, sometimes needlessly so, but its world is so interesting that you may not mind wandering around for a bit. All in all, Darkseed is the most intriguing adventure to pop onto the PC screen for some time. While established publishers keep churning out clones, Cyberdreams at least has something new and different – and plans for more of the same down the line.

NOT RATED

Cyberdreams, 21243 Ventura Blvd., Suite 208, Woodland Hills, CA 91364, (818) 348-3711; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; mouse required; $69.95

DAY OF THE TENTACLE

Day of the Tentacle puts you back in the shoes of the bumbling but lovable nerd Bernard Bernoulli – hero of LucasArts' Maniac Mansion. This time his goals are nobler: he, Laverne, and Hoagie are trying to save the world from the evil mutant Purple Tentacle.

Day of the Tentacle is a goofy exploration through a quasi-cartoon world, something akin to what you might find channel surfing on a Saturday morning. Its only fault – high memory requirements – may keep some from enjoying the ride.

Not all the Tentacles are bad, but Purple drinks industrial sludge that sends him off the deep end at the game's beginning. Purple Tentacle will stop at nothing to enslave the Earth's population. To rectify the situation, Dr. Fred sends Bernard and his cohorts back one day in time using another of his creations, the Chron-o-John. Even that didn't work: Hoagie spun back 200 years, Laverne landed 200 years in the future, and Bernard wound up going nowhere, no time.

As you try to save the world from the diabolical plans of the Purple Tentacle, you can play the game as Bernard (certainly the main character), Laverne, *and* Hoagie. In certain situations, you can toggle between your starring characters to help them along. Just look for Laverne's or Hoagie's face; when you see them, you'll know you need to switch. Help is available in other ways, too, since you can send objects found in one time to another era with the Chron-o-John. Flush, and you'll send something to the future, or the past.

Day of the Tentacle also wraps the original Maniac Mansion onto the CD. Not only is it a nice diversion from the Tentacles, but it gives you background on Bernard's earlier exploits. CD-ROM is the perfect medium for Day of the Tentacle, for this game is crammed with animation, digitized speech, music, and sound effects. Run the game though a sound board and a pair of amplified speakers, and you'll get an at-home movie-like experience.

LucasArts is pumping out some outstanding games on CD. None of them will scare Hollywood, not yet, but Day of the Tentacle should spook cartoon makers.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

LucasArts, P.O. Box 10307, San Rafael, CA 94912; (800) 782-7927; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; CD-ROM drive required for CD version; $69.95 ($59.95, floppy-based version)

DINOSAUR ADVENTURE

Knowledge Adventure's **Dinosaur Adventure** is a comprehensive, interactive look at the rise and fall of the thunder lizards. Children as young as three can click on program buttons with the hand-shaped pointer to listen as a story is read aloud, play a dinosaur matching game, or explore the earth's landscape of 250 million years ago.

Scenes depicting dinosaurs are beautifully painted, framed, and displayed on the 256-color VGA screen. Knowledge Adventure consulted with scientific experts in an attempt to recreate realistic settings.

A time-line stretched along the bottom of the screen is dynamically linked to the main scene. With a single click you can launch an adventure that takes you millions of years into the past – or back to the future – depending upon your starting point.

The program provides each dinosaur's size and weight as well as information about its lifestyle and eating habits. A dozen buttons arrayed across the top of the screen offer access to Dinosaur Adventure's activities and control its functions. You can research information in other ways, too. Click on the compass rose buttons to spin a globe, then zoom in for a closer look at a fossil site or zoom out for the sights from space.

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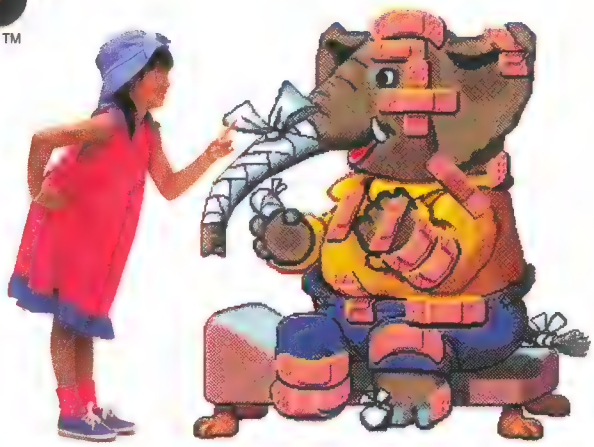

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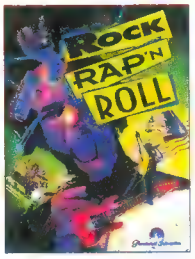

Create music in minutes and jam your socks off.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
MACINTOSH: Macintosh LC or higher. 4 MB RAM. Color monitor. Hard disk (12 MB for full install, 6 MB for partial). System 6.07 or higher. CD ROM version requires CD ROM drive.
PC COMPATIBLES: 286 or higher (386 or higher recommended) 640 K RAM. Hard disk (12 MB for full install, 6 MB for partial). MS DOS 3.3 or higher. Mouse. Speakers. Soundboards: Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro, Pro Audio Spectrum, Adlib, Tandy 3 or Disney Sound Source. CD ROM version requires CD ROM Drive.

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catalog – complete with wooden cabinets and paper cards – appears. You can click on the appropriate letter of the alphabet to pull its drawer and search for information on interesting subjects.

Among Dinosaur Adventure's unique offerings are a half-dozen mini-movies that you can play on your PC, turning your kids's computer into a home version of the Roxy Theater. Knowledge Adventure may claim that Dinosaur Adventure works on "an average home or school PC," but the movies look like flip-book animations on a 16MHz 386SX PC.

Despite the drawbacks of slow video and potentially frustrating sound card configuration steps, Dinosaur Adventure offers children the opportunity to explore science in a way no printed book can. Enriching? Certainly. Fun? You bet.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Knowledge Adventure, Inc., 4502 Dyer St., La Crescenta, CA 91214, (800) 542-4240; IBM PC or compatible; VGA/SVGA; supports AdLib Gold, Pro Audio-Spectrum, SoundBlaster, and Sound Source; hard-disk drive with 5MB free space required; mouse recommended; $49.95

DOOM

Prepare to be dazzled big-time. Unlike Id Software's Wolfenstein's Spear of Destiny, **Doom** isn't simply more of a good thing: It's a whole new deal, and far more real than it is slick.

Not that the basic game play will be all that different. From what I can tell from the far-from-finished version I had in hand, Doom preserves the elemental ingredients that made Wolfenstein the quintessential 3-D action game for the early '90s. Like its forerunner, Doom scrolls with the reckless speed of the pursued, even in its new full-screen mode, and runs under command of a handful of keys.

Id Software follows up on its phenomenal success of Wolfenstein 3-D with Doom, another up-close-and-personal action game.

You'll still be dealing hot death, this time to aliens invading a research station, as you collect the leftovers and look for secret areas. (A new feature you'll find useful is auto-mapping.) And the Schwartzenegger-like array of weapons remains though they're more sharply rendered and now bob slightly as you move.

This research station is built along lines that suggest livable space rather than simply good play value. This is a place, a *real* place.

And can you say *non-orthogonal?* Nice try! Wolfenstein was built like a bowling alley, but Doom's walls curve, break off at odd angles, and sport windows and recesses.

Light was a given in Wolfenstein 3-D. Here, it's a convenience. Doom is also going to be much more interactive. I couldn't do much more than open doors in this version, but the final take promises force fields, windows to look out, walls to blow through, elevators to run (both for transportation and for alien-squashing), and computer consoles to operate. That last item works with especially interesting effect in multiplayer games played over networks. Yup, Doom is going multiplayer.

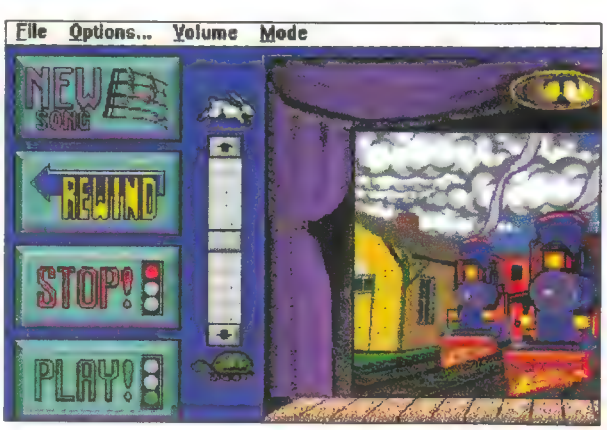
NOT RATED

Id Software, 18601 LBJ Freeway, Suite 615, Mesquite, TX 75150, (800) 434-2637; IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); 2MB RAM (possibly 4MB in final version); VGA; MS-DOS 3.3 or later; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; $40

DR. T'S SING-A-LONG

Today's aspiring vocalists have Disney SingAlong Songs on video, Raffi on CD, Wee Sing on tape, and, now, **Dr. T's Sing-A-Long** on the PC. That means even more chances your house will rock – and you'll reach for a wad of cotton.

Dr. T's Sing-A-Long provides a song's instrumentals; your kids provide the voice. This program displays and highlights the words and musical notation (just follow the bouncing ball) as it plays its 26 traditional kids' songs, which range from "Baa Baa Black Sheep" to "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." Everything works in an animated and interactive Windows environment. As each song plays, Sing-A-Long flashes pictures and animation to act out the song.



Dr. T's Sing-A-Long turns your PC into a karaoke machine.

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IBM 256 COLOR VGA DISPLAYS

SSI

The program's interface is easy to use, and younger kids (ages four and up) will have no problems making sense of it. Other nice touches are the rabbit and turtle icons that speed up or slow down the song's tempo. Unfortunately, Sing-A-Long fires up its songs without any introduction, or even a starting note. Kids have to listen to the first few notes, then jump in late after the song's started.

The documentation explains how to use Dr. T's Sing-A-Long and a PC as a kid's karaoke machine – kids can sing along and listen as their voice is mixed with the background music coming from the speakers. Of course, you need an MPC-compliant audio card and a microphone to turn this package into a karaoke box, but the money spent is more than worth it for the hours of fun you'll have.

The music in Dr. T's comes through your audio board and sounds good, but the instrumentation is limited – the program really just plays the melody. But true karaoke, like that in Sirius' PC Karaoke, features fully orchestrated CD-audio music, complete with backup vocals.

At curtain call, Dr. T's Sing-A-Long is a great idea that *does* deliver the goods, helping kids learn a bit of music's fundamentals and reinforcing music reading skills. But it leaves a lot of room for improvements, especially in light of what the competition has to offer.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Dr. T's Music Software, 124 Crescent Rd., Needham, MA 02194, (617) 455-1454, IBM PC or compatible; 3MB RAM; EGA/VGA; Windows 3.1; supports AdLib ProAudio Spectrum, and SoundBlaster; mouse required; $24.95

DUNE

In Virgin Game's **Dune,** a combination graphic adventure and strategy game, you play Paul Atreides, newly arrived on Dune, entrusted by his father Duke Leto with the task of raising spice production.

The first part of the game is spent locating small colonies, enlisting their support, prospecting, and mining. Later, you equip and train colonist soldiers to attack the ruthless Harkonnen family, and acquire the technical know-how to begin converting Dune's harsh, desert climate into a temperate terrain filled with water and vegetation. Balance these three elements (mining, fighting, and terraforming), give the Freman a little equipment, and you'll have the game won. Unfortunately, that's about all Dune has to offer.

In Dune, dazzling visual effects abound. Each room in the Atreides palace captures the futuristic, ceremonial feel of the Dune movie, with rich hues and elaborate drawings. Several different kinds of 256-color sunsets create gradually shifting, strikingly beautiful, sky-and-earth images as you swiftly fly the family ornicoptor over the bizarre desert landscape.

Unlike most graphic adventures, Dune includes no object interaction and puzzles à la a Legend or Sierra title. Its screens focus almost exclusively on the people who surround Paul, who provide information and advice: Duke Leo, Gurney Halleck, Duncan Idaho, and the rest.

Dune is a game, in fact, of static, ceremonial images rather than decision-making. You can coast along, clicking endlessly to move forward, following the prompts of friendly nonplayer characters who suggest the next simple course of action. In Dune, you either win by doing what everybody suggests or you do nothing, and lose. There's no middle path.

There's nothing interactive about this game. Despite its stunning visuals and New Age-influenced electronic rock, Dune is less a game than a computerized, slightly animated slide show, with you as bystander.

NOT RATED

Virgin Games, 18061 Fitch Ave., Irvine, CA 92714, (714) 833-8710; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA/SVGA; supports EMS/XMS expanded memory; supports AdLib Gold, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, and Roland; hard-disk drive required; mouse recommended; $59.95

DUNE II

Dune II is a strategy war game that takes the theme of the popular science-fiction novel, adds the insightful gameplay of a SimCity, combines it with the real-time action of a war game, and ends up as a compelling and exciting strategy game.

Dune is an arid, barren, and nearly uninhabitable planet known for high-speed windstorms, huge sand worms, and melange, a spice-like drug found only in that world; it extends human life significantly and makes interstellar travel possible. As a result, melange is one valuable commodity.

To increase production, the Emperor offers control of the planet and a cut of the profits to the house that can deliver the most spice. Three families take up the offer: House Atreides, House Ordos, and House Harkonnen. Cast as one of them, you must build your empire and mine the spice to gain control of the planet.

The second Dune is the better of the two, for it mixes strategy and SimCity-style simulation.

You must build your structures first, ranging from weapons factories and radar stations to barracks and refining facilities. Creating these buildings takes time and money. Meanwhile, your computer opponent is building, too, and will soon try to sabotage your operations.

Everything is Dune II happens in real time, usually with several things occurring at once. Tell your tanks and troops what to guard and whom to attack. Once you locate spice, tell the harvesters to collect it. Start production on new weapons, recruit men, and oversee construction of your facilities. Dune II takes some serious multitasking, which makes for frantic and intense entertainment.

Dune II's packed with strategy. You can build weapons to gain military might, but you'll eventually run out of credits to fund your war machine. To get credits, you've got to mine spice. To win, you must balance firepower and spice production. And along the way, watch out for those worms — they'll eat anything that moves (including tanks).

Dune II is an excellent strategy war game that's well planned and filled with addictive action.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Virgin Games, 18061 Fitch Ave., Irvine, CA 92714, (800) 874-4607; IBM PC or compatible; speech requires 4MB RAM; DOS 3.3 or later; VGA; supports AdLib, AdLib Gold, Roland, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; $59.95

DUNGEONMASTER

Legend has it that the first true point-of-view fantasy role-playing game wasn't on the PC but on the Amiga. Called **Dungeonmaster,** the game set the standard for computer role-playing games of its ilk.

But FTL, creator of Dungeonmaster, was slow in moving its prize-fighter to the much more lucrative PC market. As it dawdled, other games showed up to rule the PC first-person roost. Only now has Dungeonmaster appeared on the PC. Unfortunately, since it's nearly identical to the original Amiga version, it depends on technology several years old. Once far ahead of its time, Dungeonmaster is now faded – but it's still fun.

By today's standards, Dungeonmaster's graphics are comparatively simple and lack the detailed wall sets found in other games. The interface is the simple point-and-click, drag-and-drop object-oriented system found in many of today's games. Featuring a solid engine and once-innovative game design, Dungeonmaster is largely combat driven.

Dungeonmaster fits into the already full category of role-playing games that pit you against an evil superwizard. You choose your party of four from 24 different champions. The complex is huge, with 14 levels of nasty beasts, but it lacks any meaningful non-player character interaction. Furthermore, the game forgets automapping, and the puzzles aren't very stimulating.

In the end, Dungeonmaster shows the virtues that made it a champ. The magic system is flexible, the proving ground large, and the interface consistent. Because of its solid design, the game is eminently playable, even in an era where role-playing games runs 20MB or more. But don't bother with Dungeonmaster just because it's a bit of history – buy it because it's fun.

NOT RATED

FTL Games, 6160 Lusk Blvd., Suite C206, San Diego, CA 92121, (619) 453-5711; IBM PC or compatible (12MHz 286 minimum); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA/Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster, and Sound Source sound boards, and Tandy sound; hard-disk drive required; mouse recommended; $49.95

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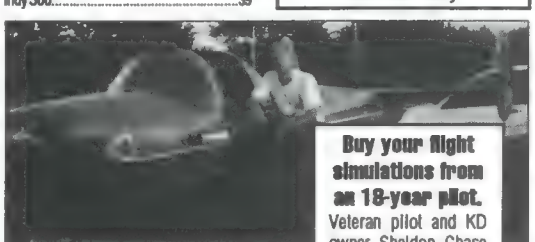

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TOP 10 CDs

By Tom Carlton

ONLY THE BEST CDS MAKE IT TO PCGAMES' TOP-10 LIST

Just a year ago, finding a ten-pack of outstanding CD games was a tough task. What a difference a dozen months make!

Now you'll find a plethora of CD-ROM packages on the shelves, with an even greater surge expected in the coming months. And with all these products to choose from, make sure you pick the ten titles that give the biggest bang for the buck. Let's take a walk down the desktop promenade and peak at the games that gained popularity during 1993, then catch a glimpse at some new entries that should draw your eyes – and your money – in 1994.

BATTLE CHESS

Battle Chess may sport a traditional chess board and chess pieces, but it really shines when it tosses 16 medieval digital sculptures onto a three-dimensional animated jousting tournament, where warriors engage in hand-to-hand combat, and where the battle's joined by the sounds of clashing armor, heralding trumpets, and crashing of drums and cymbals. You'll think Genghis Khan occupies your desktop.

Illustration Gary Yealdhall

A slothful king, a swivel-hipped queen, and clanking knights march across the battlefield with savage weapons. Multimedia mortality and chess take on new dimensions, but the intellectual challenge of chess remains. Think of it as Bobby Fisher meeting George Romero – multimedia blood and gore. If it wasn't so entertaining, you might think that this a cruel and excessive game, but its savage humor rescues it from that pit.

Loaded with detailed animations, illustrious graphics, high-spirited regal music, an historical tutorial, and outlandish sound effects, Battle Chess achieves a sense of realism that keeps you wired to your chair. Each piece combines visual detail with animation, sound effects and grand music.

Simply stunning.

THE ANIMALS

The Animals! puts the famous San Diego Zoo, a microcosm of planet Earth, on your desktop, and lets you take a digital tour without leaving home.

You tour the San Diego Zoo by navigating through a 3-D topographic map that serves as a menu. You can visit more than 300 different animal and habitat exhibits, the research labs where scientists and zoo attendants work in captive breeding and habitat management, the animal nursery, and the zoo gardens. Everything on the zoo tour's here, and then some, for you can go behind the scenes for a view of what it takes to run the place.

This stunning CD features more than 80 video clips that spice up the action and bring it up close and personal. Few of us get to witness the birth of a giraffe in real life, but this virtual animal park puts things like that – and more – on your monitor.

ANNABEL'S DREAM OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Based of a delightful children's adventure story, Annabel's Dream of Ancient Egypt sends you to the lands of the Pharaohs, and into the works Rudyard Kipling, Verdi, and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Introduced by the music of Aida, Annabel the cat imagines herself dancing among the priestesses in the Temple of Vulcan. During catnaps, Annabel enters ancient lands of great limestone felines and giant tombs of kings. While you read this story, you listen to a pleasant voice telling it. At the same time, the animated storyboard offers rich images and triumphal music.

Much more than just a multimedia reader with a rich story of adventure and good music, Annabel offers a carousel of activities. The list is long: Unscramble letters for words like pharaoh or banister; challenge your reading comprehension with "What's Happening Now;" click a word to activate the 1000-word glossary of definitions and pronunciations; explore the Land of Egypt from maps and pictures; paint in an electronic coloring book; and write and decode secret messages using the Hieroglyphics Translator.

LIVING BOOKS

Just Grandma and Me and Arthur's Teacher Trouble are animated interactive adventures for kids. Brøderbund calls these titles "Living Books," an appropriate moniker. While being fun and entertaining, they're also an educational entry into early reading.

Just Grandma and Me is based on a Mercer Mayer children's book by the same name. Leaving out nothing, yet adding the excitement of interactivity, this richly illustrated story offers a great jazzy bongo and piano sound track (á la Vince Geraldi), special sound effects, and animated talking characters with lovable personalities. Kids can even expand their cultural horizons by choosing English, Japanese, or Spanish as the narrator's language.

The highlighting phrase-by-phrase reading technique guides young readers through sentences on each page. To re-read a page, a simple click does the trick. Alternately, select individual words for pronunciation. It's a built-in tutor.

In Arthur's Teacher Trouble, one of Brøderbund's Living Books CDs, kids can follow along while the story's read in English or Spanish.

To make a long story short, Grandma and Little Critter leave their house, jump on a bus, and head for the beach. There's a wide realm of experiences that let you play with a menagerie of nature in the sun, sand, and ocean. You'll fly a kite, ski with mice behind a speeding boat, watch a raccoon and skunk play volleyball, go for a swim, snorkel with underwater life, and share these animated pages with a diversity of people, animals, and objects. After this holiday at the beach, tired and content, you're ready for the return trip home. You'll spend hours with these characters and still not discover them all, for every nook and cranny has someone or something to explore.

Grandma and Me is one of the best titles around for introducing your kids to computer fun and computer learning. If you want more, pick up Arthur's Teacher Trouble, a 24-page multimedia reader containing a clever sense of humor and a greater reading challenge than Just Grandma and Me.

Arthur's third grade teacher, Mr. Ratburn, fills the "pages" with fear, frustration, challenge, and accomplishment for Arthur and his classmates as they prepare for

a spelling bee. Loaded with humor, Arthur takes you on a belly-busting comedy tour as classmates describe "The Rat" as a vampire with magical powers or "One wrong move and he'll put you on death row." It's a crack-up.

KING'S QUEST V: ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GO YONDER!

The necromancer, Mordak, a nasty piece of work, conjures a whirling, thunderous storm that sucks up the King's castle and family. The skies of Daventry darken. As King Graham returns home to this devastation, his mind reels as cold fear grips his heart, sending his pulse pounding. In this disquieted mood, he barely hears the hooting of an owl. Graham spins around to confront Sedrick, who's wearing a blue vest and gold monocle, and who tells the King about these wicked works he saw. And that's just the opening of Sierra's King's Quest V, a graphic adventure on CD.

With great consternation and a touch of fairy dust, the bespectacled owl and the brawny, handsome King take flight over river and valley to find and consult the good wizard Crispin. Upon arrival at Crispin's cozy cottage, the venerable wizard, with flowing long white beard, cloaked in a monk's cape, invites Graham into his inner sanctum. Here, Graham listens to stories about the evil Mordak, and partakes of magic snake meat that empowers him with the ability to communicate with animals and the natural world. Crispin further endows him with the powers of a vintage wand. After these rights-of-passage, the good patrician wishes them well while Sedrick and Graham begin an adventurous search for the King's family.

This story is painted on a visually rich canvas. The introduction is well animated, beautifully illustrated, and enhanced with music and extensive spoken narratives. These realistic animated characters, living in detailed centuries-old villages within a variety of ecological settings, should capture your imagination. This is one game with a view.

Our heroes will pass many travails, collect many objects, venture through many lands, and meet many enemies. Ultimately, the journey requires a dangerous trip across the mountains to reach the great ocean on the other side, where rescue of Graham's family becomes the goal of the quest.

This luxuriant visual and auditory adventure offers compelling entertainment. Watch out, it's addictive.

LOOM

Loom, a cinematic, panoramic full-voice "talkie" adventure game, may not have worked on floppy, but it sure does on CD. The backdrop is set with high-quality 3-D graphics of stunning landscapes, and the soundtrack fills in the gaps.

Constructed from a single thread, this intricately-designed story is filled with fantastic characters and challenging puzzles. You assist young Bobbin Threadbare in weaving a story from a plethora of lines, all the while unraveling the mysteries of LOOM and the fate of Bobbin.

The Weavers Guild possesses remarkable weaving powers that transcend the limits of physical cloth. Powers of healing, seeing in the dark, exchanging one's reflection with another, becoming invisible, spinning straw into gold, and casting terror into the hearts of enemies are just a sample of the spells. Using these powers, you and Bobbin must learn to weave the fabric of life and begin the adventure from LOOM Island.

Adventure takes off after you sail to the Mainland, a land where dastardly dragons rule and legions of dead rise from the grave. As Bobbin, you must solve the mystery of why strange powers swept away the Guild. When you do, you'll gain the knowledge you need to rescue the Guild and save the universe from an unthinkable catastrophe.

Unlike other adventure games, LOOM doesn't require tiresome mapping of caves and caverns, or collecting an inventory of objects. Instead, you learn a vocabulary of musical notes, called threads. Set on a musical scale, you select four notes from the vocabulary and spin musical drafts – from Opening and Summoning to Aphrodesia and Silence – into threads of influence.

All told, this game has an intricate plot, splendid graphics, and rich variety of dialects – just what you'd expect from LucasArts. A touch of Hollywood on the PC.

MIXED-UP MOTHER GOOSE

Mother Goose has a big mess on her hands. All her classic rhymes are messed up. Your job is to untangle the threads and put the rhymes right.

Sierra's Mixed-up Mother Goose uses an elegant point-and-click interface that's simple enough that three- and four-year-olds will have little trouble scooting up to the desktop, but not too elementary to put off kids twice as old.

This nursery-rhyme land is filled with pathways that kids travel to reunite the missing objects to their proper owner. When you match up the piece and the person, the screen comes to life with the words, music, and song of the rhyme.

Mother Goose works as an early reader and excels in introducing computers to youngsters.

PUTT-PUTT JOINS THE PARADE

Putt-Putt, a bouncy, bug-eyed buggy with the voice of a child, rises in his garage to the news on his car radio: "Wake up you swamp buggies and join the Cartown Pet Parade. Don't be a crankcase, get in gear and join the parade."

In Humongous Entertainment's Putt-Putt Joins the Parade, kids steer this cartoon car through a 3-D landscape filled with animated, talking automobiles, Putt-Putt takes you down a country road and through a village filled with stores and activities.

To join the parade, Putt-Putt must earn some money delivering groceries to houses on Blue Street for Mr. Baldini the grocer, or by mowing lawns at houses along

MORE SPINS

More spectacular spins are coming to your CD-ROM drive during the coming year as several new compact disc-based games hit store shelves. This sampling represents only a fraction of what's coming, but serves well as an indication of the range of 1994's entertainment and education CD software.

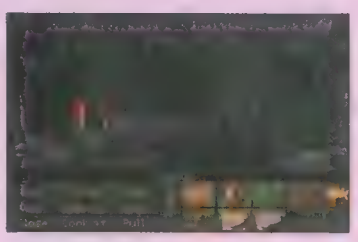
AMERICANS IN SPACE. With over 500 narrated photos and an hour of video covering American manned space missions, this Multicom compact disc is a must-have for anyone with an interest in NASA or space history.

Multicom's Americans in Space isn't a game, but a complete tour through the past 30 years of space history.

DINOSAUR ADVENTURE. Better known for its multimedia titles that fit on a hard disk, Knowledge Adventure also produces CD versions of its wares. This disc shows full-motion video of scientifically accurate dinosaurs, and is a good pick for budding paleontologists of all ages.

DISTANT SUNS FOR WINDOWS, THE DESKTOP PLANETARIUM. Astronomy buffs will find this Virtual Reality Laboratories title a convenient way to study the stars and learn about the universe.

GREAT NAVAL BATTLES – NORTH ATLANTIC 1939–1943. SSI offers an amazing simulation of naval warfare during World War II in this battlewagon-heavy game. Perfect for nautical buffs and students of WWII.



Flush with dialog and music, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis is one of LucasArts' best "talkies."

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS. LucasArts turns one of its best titles into a full-voice "talkie" that spotlights some cool sound effects.

THE MUSICAL WORLD OF PROFESSOR PICCOLO. This Opcode Interactive CD is as much instructive as it is entertaining. You'll learn to read music, listen to music history, and delve into musical instruments.

PC KARAOKE. This Sirius Publishing product turns your PC into a full-blown karaoke machine. The CD plays tunes, you warble into the microphone, and the PC shows the lyrics.

THE 7TH GUEST. Virgin Games ground-breaking CD pushes a few corners of the envelope with full-frame animation and an attention-grabbing score. You walk through a 22-room mansion that's filled with scary secrets.

The first made-for-CD game to make it to market, Virgin's The 7th Guest sets you up for mystery and murder in an old mansion.

Red Street. With a few coins in hand you're off to the car wash. After finding a few more needed objects and following the clues along the route, it's off to the parade.

Putt-Putt travels through colorful scenes filled with interactive animated objects to explore. Clara the cow blocks the road – how do you get her to move? Butterflies flutter, fish leap, and birds chirp. Give it two kid-sized thumbs up.

Putt-Putt Joins the Parade is a great pick for preschoolers when you pop for Humongous Entertainment's CD version.

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

Seeking fame, fortune, and easy money? Want adventure? Is your wit twice as sharp as your sword? Then you should join Guybrush Treepwood as he searches for The Secret of Monkey Island.

You must unlock the hidden mysteries of this pirate adventure by mastering three things: the sword, the art of thievery, and a thirst for treasure. Once you've got those licked, you crew a ship of lazy mutinous beggars on a voyage to the forbidden Monkey Island, where you'll rescue the love of your life, your main squeeze, from the ghostly grip of LeChuck. The characters are insolent yet hilarious, the puzzles challenge your imagination, and the storyline keeps you LeChuckling.

Developing your skills as a master of the sword requires a lot of dueling practice (maybe insult practice would be closer to the truth). Dueling pirates line the paths leading from the harbor through mountainous forested terrain. If you're a quick study while digging for treasure, earning money as cannon fodder, or mastering the sword, you'll learn the fine art of insult, for you must develop an articulate tongue before you confront the sharpest of tongues, the Sword Master.

When Guybrush reaches Monkey Island, he really kicks butt, though not before confronting perils of the jungle, vile castaways, and natives making preparations for Guybrush soufflé. Primal instincts

and primate friends assist you in acquiring the means to LeChuck's end.

This sparkling CD offers excellent graphics, a splendid stereo sound track of Calypso and Reggae music, and some striking sound effects. Being a cosmopolitan game, it allows selection of five languages – English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish – with which to hurl inflammatory insults.

The Secret of Monkey Island offers hours of humorous adventure for the entire family, as long as that family is a grog-swilling, swashbuckling, sea-faring, impertinent bunch.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? DELUXE EDITION

This Carmen-on-CD sets the standard for education and entertainment compact disc titles. Excellent mystery and intrigue inside Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe Edition takes you from the streets of San Francisco's Chinatown and the ancient cities of Mali to the Buddhist temples of Southeast Asia and the foggy lanes of London. A splendor of sights and sounds from around the world forms the backdrop for a game the whole family will enjoy.

To play this world-class, globe-trotting adventure, you just slip on your gumshoes, dial a travel agent for a first-class flight, then track down those vile villains who plunder our world. A glut of stunning digitized photographs, stereo recordings of folk music, maps, and a remarkable cast of animated characters is packed on this shiny disc.

From dozens of possible mysteries assigned by the Chief, your assignment, if you decide to take it, is to recover the statues of Gog and Magog taken from Guildhall in London.

The video telephone, note pad, and picture window metaphors make the easy-to-use interface interesting. Pressing the Travel auto-dial button on your flip phone brings up a sassy, mop-haired travel agent who sends you jetting off to London. Your flight is filled with traditional Scottish highland music and a window in the notepad advises, "The United Kingdom consists of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. UK has close ties with its former empire, countries from India, to Africa, the Far East, to North America." This is one terrific geography lesson set in cultural context.

You're ready to start collecting the evidence – necessary before you can obtain a warrant – that will lead you to one of 20 possible suspects, who are tagged with kid-compatible names like Irma Dillow and Sandy Dune. Click a button to view the dossiers of these desperadoes and determine needed information, from hair and eye color and hobbies to food preferences and distinguishing features. Once you've collected enough clues, you send the evidence to Warrant Robot, who matches evidence to the dossiers. If your evidence matches the ID, you get an arrest warrant. That creep is heading for the big-house.

This brilliant combination of entertainment and education will keep the whole family interested for hours. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

The Animals
Software Toolworks
60 Leveroni Court
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(415) 883-3000
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Annabel's Dream of Ancient Egypt
Texan Caviar, Inc.
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IBM AND COMPATIBLES: 386 or higher, 16 MHz or higher, 4 MB RAM, VGA with 256 colors, Windows 3.1 or greater, mouse, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro or compatible, external speakers. Diskette version requires 10 MB hard disk space. MEGA version requires CD ROM drive.

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THE CLASSROOM COMES HOME

Give your kids – and yourself – a head start with the right setup for your home learning center.

By Cynthia E. Field

When it comes to buying a new computer – or beefing up an existing one – kids have the fast solution: just buy everything. From flight-sim yokes to stereo sound cards to gotta-zap-'em arcade games, kids want it all. And who can blame them? In one short decade computers have revolutionized the way we work and play. They've also transformed the way we learn.

SERVE YOU?

Whether from disenchantment with the public schools or a desire to give kids an edge in an increasingly technological world, moms and dads are buying PCs in record numbers. After what seemed like an inordinately long time in the incubator, the so-called home market has finally hatched. *Business Week* reports that 27 percent of all PCs sold in the U.S. in 1992 were homeward bound. By 1996, that proportion is expected to rise to over 40 percent.

Just knowing how to get the most for your money can be confusing, what with the ads touting everything from RAM to MHz, CD-ROM to SVGA. (You know things are getting serious when glossy ads for back-to-school PCs are juxtaposed to those for blue jeans, book bags, and lunch boxes.) But before you grab your wallet and jump in the minivan – or call a mail-order merchant's toll-free telephone number – take time to consider a few prerequisites.

Whether you plan to use a PC as a supplement to your children's classroom experience, as a resource in your home-school, as a personal skill-builder, or as a vehicle for distance learning, choosing the right physical location for

Illustration: Francis Mao

PC GAME

your PC is, to borrow a phrase, job number one.

SET IT RIGHT

Despite advances in educational technology, some things never change. Teachers have long advised parents to make sure that kids have a quiet place to study and to do their homework. The PC-based home learning center is no exception. Simply put, your child's bedroom is probably the ideal location for his or her computer. As a parent it's easy to minimize distractions there, while by contrast, stifling the doorbell, phone and sibling noise in the main areas of the home is just about impossible.

Unless you're the parent of an only child, you can't afford a PC for every kid in the house. Even though growing numbers of households boast two PCs – and in some cases three or more – the investment would be a budget-buster for most families. A reasonable compromise is to put your PC on wheels. Rolling desks or carts are often available in discount stores for less than $100. These movable workstations feature shelves that accommodate the computer, monitor, keyboard and sometimes even the printer. Not only does this kind of desk conserve space, but it lets you or your children roll the equipment from room to room. When homework's done – or on weekends – glide the PC into the rec room for games or simply to foster a sense of family togetherness.

Like outfitting a nursery for a newborn, you need to prep your home for the family's newest electronic gadget. You'll quickly discover that an ordinary two-outlet power plug can't cut it, not with an octopus-like tangle of cords to plug in. At a minimum, you'll need three outlets: one for the monitor, one for the printer, another for the PC. Add an external CD-ROM drive and chalk up another plug; ditto if you hook up a pair of powered speakers. You can add more outlets just by plugging in a power strip, which usually has a row of six.

Hiring an electrician to run a separate circuit for your home computer can be good preventive measure – especially if the wiring in your home is Jurassic. A PC sharing the same circuit as power-hungry appliances like a refrigerator (even a hair dryer) may not trip a breaker or blow a fuse, but power sags can lead to data loss and can even damage the computer's hard-disk drive. If the lights flicker when the fridge kicks on, it may be time to call in an electrician, unless you can plug your PC into a more isolated circuit.

Another device that can protect your PC is a UPS or uninterruptible power supply. These units, which double as power conditioners and backup batteries, cost considerably less today than even a year ago. At a street price of a hundred dollars or so, a UPC is one terrific investment. A modest-size unit provides sufficient backup power so that you can properly shutdown your system in case of a power outage.

As the saying goes, you're not completely dressed without a smile. If you plan to go on-line or send faxes from your PC, the home learning center won't be fully plug-and-play without a nearby phone jack. A single existing phone jack can easily accommodate a second device such as a modem. Just pick up a duplex converter for a few dollars at Radio Shack or a home repair store.

Preparing the PC's physical environment will seem like drudgery only until you bring the system home. Covering the basics means you and the kids can begin enjoying your new computer well before the car engine – and your credit card – have cooled off.

FUTURE SHOCK

But before you take the plunge, brace yourself: The machine that just cost you a couple grand will be technologically obsolete in less than three years.

The news isn't all bad. A state-of-the-marketplace PC with sufficient expansion slots can help you forestall the inevitable. You'll be able to upgrade today's PC so that it continues to serve your needs until you're ready to purchase the newer, faster, more feature-filled system which will ultimately supplant it. Like electrical outlets, the more slots the merrier. Shop for a PC with at least three available expansion slots.

Although close-outs abound on PCs with 80286 and 80386 processors, steer clear. To run the newest educational games, you'll need a PC with a 486 microprocessor running at a clock speed of at least 25 Megahertz (MHz).

Anything less than 4MB of RAM (Random Access Memory) is asking for trouble. Microsoft's Windows graphical interface and its associated software has surpassed text-based applications in popularity, and Windows has a big appetite for both memory and for hard-disk storage space. Select a system which includes a large hard drive. Of course, more is better. (You knew that was coming, didn't you?) If children would only tire of educational games faster, you could just erase them from the hard drive and install new ones in their place. No such luck. Kids like to revisit their favorite programs. Look for a hard drive with at least 200MB of storage space.

Your kids are going to spend countless hours viewing the computer screen. That's reason enough to buy the best monitor you can afford. A 14-inch non-interlaced color VGA monitor with a dot pitch of at least 0.28 should do the trick. But a 15-inch or larger multisync monitor with a high refresh rate – for flicker-free viewing – will be even easier on the eyes. Moreover, a multisync monitor can switch to SVGA (Super VGA) mode, when required, for games which support that video standard. In general, SVGA affords finer resolution and a larger color palette.

You've probably heard talk about carpel tunnel syndrome, the repetitive motion ailment that often strikes people who spend long hours at the PC. You can fight back – against carpel tunnel and other physical discomforts and problems – by selecting a chair that supports your child properly, by providing adequate task lighting, and by placing keyboard and mouse wrist supports on the desktop. Make the home learning center as com-

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Because your PC's performance is still at ground level, you've just become a painted star under his cockpit canopy. So before you select "New Game", jet to your phone and call Media Vision Resource, where Fusion CD 16™ is on sale for just $399. That's not much for a complete multimedia system that brings Media Vision's award-winning, 16-bit "sound of adventure" to your PC. And because Fusion CD comes equipped with an internal or external CD-ROM drive and powerful amplified speakers, you'll experience the screaming highs and shuddering lows of a top performance, interactive upgrade system. Plus, you get a cargo load of CD-ROM software. Including Compton's Multimedia Encyclopedia, Battle Chess, Mantis, and Civilization! But react fast, this offer is good only while supplies last! After that, it goes down in flames! Call Media Vision today.

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Circle 40 on Reader Service Card

fortable as possible and your family will spend hours at the PC without walking away feeling fatigued.

Sometimes it's easy to forget the essential. In the case of the classroom in the home, that often means software. Fortunately, many name-brand manufacturers – Compaq, Dell, IBM, and others – bundle ready-to-run software with the machines they sell. Although educational games are noticeably absent from the lineup, preinstalled software usually includes DOS 6, Windows, and an integrated package of some sort. Integrated applications – word processor, database, spreadsheet, graphics, and telecommunications – are so easy to use that an older child can use them to type homework assignments, create term paper bibliographies, and even budget her allowance.

THAT'S EDUTAINMENT

Depending on the make and model you choose, you should be able to snag a system with the features described here for less than $1,500, with another $200 for a good dot-matrix printer. Compaq's Presario line is just one good example of the latest trend toward value-pricing. (But wait, there's more!) Some manufacturers pump up their offerings with a CD-ROM drive, a sound card and a pair of stereo speakers. So-called MPC (multimedia PC) systems cost about $500 more than the stripped-down version.

Smoother animation, more colorful graphics and brighter sound are among the benefits of a multimedia machine and its software. Digitized human speech, realistic sound effects and professionally composed music soundtracks are quickly displacing the cartoonish speech bubbles, dinky sounds and tinny music you get with stock PCs.

The good news, from a financial perspective, is that you don't have to purchase a preconfigured MPC system up front. You can begin with the basics and add multimedia components later. A SoundBlaster or compatible sound card and desktop speakers cost less than a couple hundred dollars and CD-ROM drives with appropriate interfaces are available for less than $400. Another option, a multimedia upgrade kit, is an alternative which countless numbers of PC-shopping parents are expected to buy this holiday season. A kit – which typically includes a CD-ROM starter library with educational and/or entertainment titles – costs between $400 and $600 and provides the pieces you need to upgrade your existing PC to the MPC standard. Among the usual suspects appearing in such CD-ROM software bundles libraries is Carmen Sandiego, leader of a fictitious band of globe-trotting thieves who steal national treasures.

Kids love Carmen. As millions of them have already discovered, weaving together clues about history, geography, or astronomy is a small price to pay for the high you get when you nail perps like Carmen and her cronies. Or when you and Jake and Jennifer Eagle crack cases in suburban Richview by applying small doses of logical thinking in EA*Kids' Eagle Eye Mysteries.

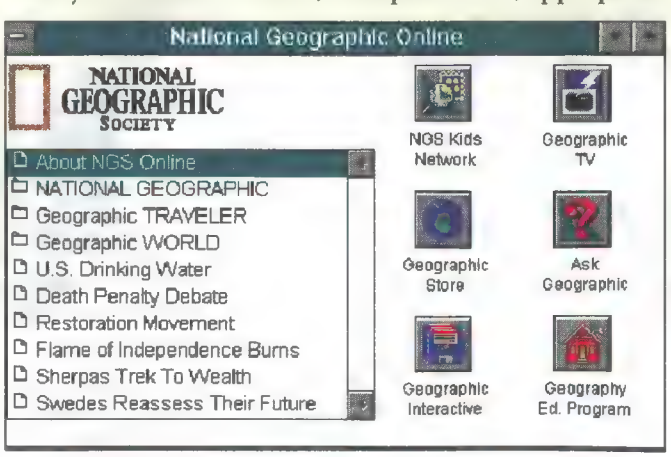
Brøderbund's Where in Space is Carmen Sandiego? sends kids on a detective sweep through outer space.

It's elementary, my dear parents. PC whodunits are among the most popular kinds of educational software. But arcade-action games, interactive adventures, electronic building blocks and multimedia reference tools earn high marks with children, too. How else can you explain the popularity of programs such as Treasure Cove, Mixed Up Fairy Tales, KidCAD, or Microsoft Dinosaurs? You name it – science, math, reading, the arts – there's a PC program that brings the subject to life, often with no parental supervision required. (For more, take a peek at the "Home Classroom Top 40" sidebar for a list of edutainment hits for the home learning library.)

BEAM ME UP, PC

Computer learning isn't just kids' stuff, though. Adults of all ages use PCs for self-improvement as well as for career advancement. Nearly every PC user, it seems, wants to take the on-ramp to the data superhighway. For little more than the price of a local phone call, you can research a term paper, noodle around Smithsonian Online, or work toward a college degree. The on-line world is one of friendly forums and information-filled databases.

All you need is a modem, a telephone line, appropriate



The National Geographic Online area is just one of America Online's educational-oriented resources.

PACIFIC STRIKE

RETRACING THE MISSIONS OF WORLD WAR II FLYING ACES IS FASCINATING, BUT REWRITING HISTORY IS THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE ...

In Pacific Strike, you cruise into all major battles of the Pacific theatre — Pearl Harbor, The Coral Sea, Midway, Guadalcanal, the Solomon Islands, the Marianas, Leyte Gulf, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Now you can change the outcome of each battle and the entire war through your own successes and failures. Can you force an end to the war before the bomb is dropped on Hiroshima?

- Fly the *Wildcat, Corsair, Hellcat, Devastator, Dauntless, Avenger* and *Helldiver*, enjoying the astounding realism of their fully instrumented cockpits. You'll do more than practice!
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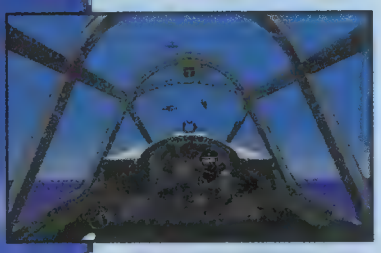
- Prove those skills in a stunning variety of missions — grueling dogfights over the Pacific, dive-bombing runs against carriers and warships (including the *Yamato*!) and challenging rocket attacks on pillboxes, airfields and other ground installations.



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Available at a software retailer near you or call 1-800-245-4525 for MC/Visa/Discover orders.

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software and a subscription to a national service such as America Online, CompuServe, or Delphi. To access the first two you need proprietary software. America Online's is free, while CompuServe makes you pay for its connect software. Any telecommunication program can put you in touch with Delphi. Most take a more elegant approach, but Windows' Terminal program is the low-budget solution.

Each on-line service is different, both in the number and kind of educational resources it offers. Virtually all let you access on-line encyclopedias and, in one form or another, play games. You can also tap into knowledge bases devoted to specialized topics in areas such as health, business, or politics. What's more, government publications, educational software reviews, and top news stories are just a phone call away, 24 hours a day.

With more than 1,700 services, CompuServe Information Service (a.k.a. CIS) is perhaps the most comprehensive. From its huge public domain and shareware library you can download educational programs to use on your PC. Many of these low-cost or no-cost programs are of surprisingly good quality and worth a try. Dozens of PC hardware and software vendors provide on-line support through CIS, making it the best place to look when you need the latest hardware device driver or software bug fix.

But thanks in part to its slick user interface, America Online's Learning and Reference area is unparalleled. In addition to forums like the Parents' Information Network, National Geographic Online and Career Center,

HOME CLASSROOM TOP 40

Drill-and-practice is out. Edutainment's in. And the software shelves at computer superstores – not to mention the pages of mail-order catalogs – are crammed with programs that make learning fun. These can't-miss edutainment offerings can give you a head start building a computer learning library in your home. Contact each publisher for program requirements and a free catalog.

Broderbund Software, Inc.
500 Redwood Blvd.
P.O. Box 6121
Novato, CA 94948-6121
(415) 382-4569
KidCuts (arts and crafts)
KidPix (drawing)
Living Books: Arthur's Teacher Trouble (interactive storybook)
Living Books: Just Grandma and Me (interactive storybook)
The Playroom (early learning)
The Treehouse (language, math, and music)
Where in Space Is Carmen Sandiego? (astronomy)
Where in America's Past Is Carmen Sandiego? (history)

Compton's NewMedia
2320 Camino Vida Roble
Carlsbad, CA 92009-1504
(800) 862-2206
Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia for Windows (general reference)
Jazz: A Multimedia History (music)

Davidson & Associates, Inc.
19840 Pioneer Ave.
Torrance, CA 90503
(310) 793-0600
Headline Harry and the Great Paper Race (geography)
KidCAD (computer-aided design)
Kid Works 2 (language and art)
Math Blaster for Windows (arithmetic)

EA*Kids: A Division of Electronic Arts
1450 Fashion Island Blvd.
San Mateo, CA 94404
(415) 513-7379
Jake & Jennifer Eagle in Eagle Eye Mysteries (reading, problem-solving)
Peter Pan's Painting Adventure (painting, storytelling)

America Online (affectionately called AOL by its devotees) provides access to the Electronic University Network where you can earn college credits and degrees. Students can drop in at the Academic Assistance Center to schedule tutoring sessions or use Teacher Pager to solicit immediate help.

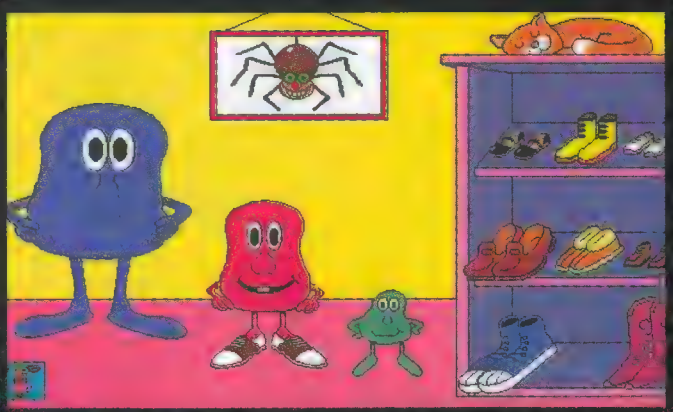
For just a few dollars per month over the cost of a basic subscription, Delphi provides members with full access to the Internet, a prototype of what Vice President Al Gore calls the national data superhighway. Through a link to the Internet, you can log in to thousands of remote computers – not just in the U.S., but in the far corners of the world. One minute your PC's talking to a mainframe at a Midwestern university; the next, you're "telenetting" to a university library in Australia. You can download weather maps, Supreme Court rulings, or the full text of some of the greatest literary works of all time. Although Delphi's interface isn't as visually attractive as that of AOL or even the Windows version of CIS, the educational value of Delphi's Internet connection is incalculable.

LIFETIME LEARNING

In the home as in the classroom, a personal computer can help kids and adults master traditional academic subjects and explore special interest topics. Although text books are probably here to stay, the proliferation of PCs in the home proves that a floppy disk, a CD-ROM, or a modem can light the lamp of knowledge in ways a textbook never will. ❑

Edmark Corporation
P.O. Box 3218
Redmond, WA 98073-3218
(800) 556-8484
Millie's Math House (early learning)

Grolier Electronic Publishing, Inc.
Sherman Turnpike
Danbury, CT 06816
(800) 285-4534
The New Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia (general reference)



Millie's Math House helps early learners with the basic-numbers racket.

Knowledge Adventure, Inc.
4502 Dyer St.
La Crescenta, CA 91214
(818) 542-4200
Dinosaur Adventure (science, natural history)
Space Adventure (science)

Microsoft Corporation
One Microsoft Way
Redmond, WA 98052-6399
(800) 426-9400
Microsoft Bookshelf (general reference)
Microsoft Dinosaurs (you had to ask?)
Microsoft Musical Instruments (music)

BC

Sierra On-Line, Inc.
P.O. Box 485
Coarsegold, CA 93614-9850
(800) 326-6654
Castle of Dr. Brain (math, logic)
EcoQuest: The Search for Cetus (science, ecology)
Island of Dr. Brain (math, logic, problem-solving)
Mixed Up Fairy Tales (interactive stories)
Mixed Up Mother Goose (interactive stories)
Quarky & Quaysoo's Turbo Science (science)

The Learning Company
6493 Kaiser Drive
Fremont, CA 94555
(800) 852-2255
MetroGnome's Music (music)
Operation Neptune (math, science)
Reader Rabbit 2 (language arts)
The Children's Writing & Publishing Center (word-processing, desktop publishing)
Treasure Cove (reading, math, science)
Treasure Mountain (early learning)

The Software Toolworks
60 Leveroni Court
Novato, CA 94949
(800) 234-3088
Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing (keyboard skills)
The San Diego Zoo Presents: The Animals (animal science)

Walt Disney Computer Software, Inc.
3800 West Alameda Ave.
Burbank, CA 91505
(818) 973-4015
Follow the Reader with Mickey Mouse (language arts)
Mickey's ABC's Enhanced (early learning)
Mickey's 123's Enhanced (early learning)

Joy Here

LOST GAMES

Some games never make it out of the labs to see the light of day. Here's a behind the scenes look at these foresaken ventures.

By Peter Olafson

In a sense, the game could not have been better named: Mean Time. While this time-travel role-playing game from Interplay Productions was in development – over a period of about four years – something always seemed to be happening in the meantime to interrupt it. Its existence seems to have been fitful – on, then off, then on again, then off again – but its resilience was prodigious.

"It is," reports a member of the development team, "the Project that Would Not Die."

Illustration: Eric Lee

Mean Time is often referred to as a sequel to the great Interplay role-playing game Wasteland. But it's more like a once-removed cousin than a child, with a similar game engine, some of the same strengths and the ability to import Wasteland characters.

It started off strongly as an Apple IIe product perhaps six months after Interplay's separation from Electronic Arts. "Then it ran into a whole bunch of weird things," says Interplay's Bruce Schlickbernd. "It just kept getting cut off and stuck off in a corner and then remembered after a while."

The Mean Time programmer was assigned to work on the Apple IIGS conversion of Neuromancer, and the conversion took months longer than projected, Schlickbernd says. Two of the three designers had other projects to attend to, so then there was one – although one ready and willing to pursue the project. With the IIe market foundering, Interplay decided to do the game for the IBM instead, which meant the graphics had to be converted and the game engine's needed to be revamped.

Of course, at length, Mean Time did die – of old age before it was born, for the lack of a better description. Schlickbernd, who was an associate producer on Mean Time during its "middle" period, didn't know exactly what led to the cancellation of the IBM version, but indicates that the state of the art had passed it by. He suggests that they would have been better off starting over with a clean slate. When Time was called, it was in a rough alpha state – still lacking a lot of art and needing rearrangement of plot elements – with an estimated three to four months remaining before it would have gone to playtesting.

"If you had ever played Wasteland, you would have recognized Mean Time in a second – if only because it was all the same people working on it," Schlickbernd says. "It was very similar – except that, instead of walking from one area to another, you were walking through a time portal back to a base where you were trying to repair the fabric of time.

"Anyone who liked Wasteland would probably have liked this."

SLIP & SLIDE

Mean Time fared better than many games in the land of the lost. People recognize its name. They know about the link to the beloved Wasteland. They still ask "whatever happened to" about it now and then. The game wasn't issued, but its legend lives on. Some things just won't ever rest in peace.

Any devoted gamer knows the crying game of unreleased products by heart: It's the very stuff of a game-fanatic's life. You hear of a game. Perhaps it's just a graph or two in a show report. Perhaps not even that much. But it connects with you at some visceral level – sets off chimes as though it had been made to your personal specs – and you begin to, well, stalk it through development. You rejoice when you hear a release date, and again when the first screenshots appear (thus verifying that something has coalesced out of the vapor) and it doesn't bother you much when you hear that the release date has slid somewhat (release-date slides being endemic to the industry).

One day you read something cryptic on the nets, call the publisher in panic and a bored-sounding operator tells you, "Oh, they're not working on that anymore."

But then the date seems to slide ...and slide...and slide. The little slides seem to smear into one, and one day you read something cryptic on the nets that could be read as a cancellation, call the publisher in panic and a bored-sounding operator tells you, as though relaying old news, "Oh, they're not working on that anymore." You stare blindly at the receiver and do your best Jackie Gleason imitation. ("Homina-homina-homina.") Game over, man, game over. Game over before it even started.

Your pet game-in-waiting has fallen into the ranks of the disappeareds – games that were planned or developed for the IBM PC and its clones, but that never quite made it into the unblinking fluorescent glare of store shelves. If it exists, it exists only in old press releases, the back of disk boxes, the dreams of authors, the last best hopes of gamers.

Admittedly, this is not something one hears much about on the IBM these days. The phenomena tends to be associated more with platforms of uncertain status – the Commodore 64 in the late '80s, the Atari ST in the early '90s and, more recently, the Amiga market – rather than a 80-percent-plus-market-share colossus. With production costs so heady, and so many eyes on the prize along the gauntlet, projects of uncertain standing these days typically are less likely to proceed beyond a certain point. (On the other hand,

there were doubtless many games that fell by the wayside in the early- and mid-80s, when the IBM was essentially a four-color business machine drafted into game-playing service.)

At the same time, it's easy to make mistakes in this regard. Sometimes the game you think has vanished without a trace is just spectacularly late in arriving, and hence keeping a sensibly low profile until the developers iron out the last kinks. FTL's Dungeon Master, SSI's Dark Sun, Konami's Frontier (the much-delayed sequel to Elite) and Gremlin Graphics' Daemonsgate would all fit nicely into that category.

And, possibly, it's actually out there somewhere. But it's not out here. As the IBM grows more popular in Europe, for instance, the output of conversions and IBM-first games clamoring for an audience in the huge U.S. market has risen correspondingly. But only a handful of companies – Electronic Arts and MicroProse, for instance – have the resources to maintain overseas divisions – and when the European publisher isn't also the American publisher...well, let's just say there's many a potential slip between the Yank and the Brit.

A SOFTWARE EMBARGO?

Cadaver and Battlemaster are excellent examples. The former is a vast (and delightful) angled-down-view puzzle-adventure from the Bitmap Brothers (the UK development outfit responsible for games like Speedball 2 and the Chaos Engine). Battlemaster is a role-playing game with strong arcade elements. Both were published in the UK by Mirrorsoft, and Konami had the US rights.

That all changed when Robert Maxwell toppled into the sea, his empire toppled in after him – including his computer-game company Mirrorsoft – and in the process dragged Konami's rights under with it. Both games can be found as imports (for those who know where to find such things), but never formally turned up on these shores.

The Mirrorsoft debacle would likewise consign a pair of latter-day Cinemaware games – followups to TV Sports: Basketball and Football – to computer-game oblivion. The basketball game, the more advanced of the two, had a playmaker and a closeup shot for dunking the ball. (Mercifully, two other sports games, TV Sports: Baseball and TV Sports: Boxing, ultimately surfaced on the DataEast label as Bo Jackson Baseball and ABC's Wide World of Sports Boxing.)

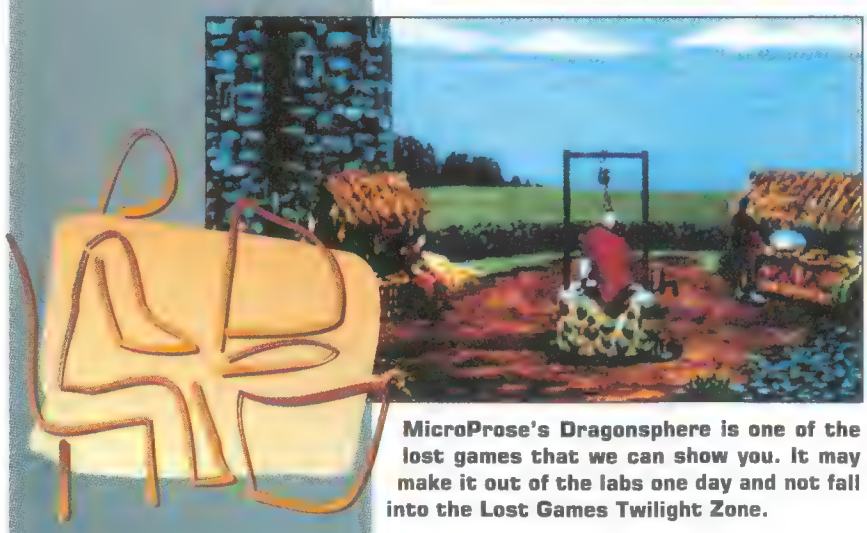
Cinemaware's own collapse also left behind a healthy chunk of a major-league action-adventure for the IBM. The Enemy Within was a sophisticated vertically-scrolling arcade game that made use of live video, interaction screens, and a variation on the storytelling device used in It Came from the Desert. It was better than half-finished and had cost the label in the neighborhood of $400,000 by the time the curtain went down at Cinemaware. Former Cinemaware president Bob Jacobs indicated earlier this year he doesn't see a final product ever surfacing.

When Robert Maxwell toppled into the sea, his empire – including his computer-game company Mirrorsoft – toppled in after him, dragging down Konami's rights for Cadaver and Battlemaster.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

But even active, thriving publishers seem to have a wayward child or two. For instance, earlier this year, Three-Sixty was planning to release Battlecruiser 3000 – a game combining Wing Commander-like spaceflight sequences with resource management – but it was canceled because the game wasn't coming along fast enough, and is now under contract with another publisher, according to Three-Sixty spokeswoman Karen Conroe.

MicroProse's MegaTraveller 3 and Twilight 2001 projects were called off early in 1993 because response to the original games wasn't judged sufficient to warrant sequels. And at press time, the fate of Dragonsphere – the third animated adventure from the development unit responsible for Rex Nebular and Return of the Phantom – was still up in the air. MicroProse spokesman Matt Fick said it was riding principally on cash-flow issues and the results of the corpo-



MicroProse's Dragonsphere is one of the lost games that we can show you. It may make it out of the labs one day and not fall into the Lost Games Twilight Zone.

rate reorganization that followed the company's recent merger with Spectrum Holobyte. It will be completed, but it hadn't determined whether anything would be done with it at all, whether MicroProse would market the game itself or license it for marketing by another publisher (the possibility Fick indicated was most likely).

Sometimes release is simply a matter of timing. Consider the case of Quarterstaff: The Tomb of Setmoth – one of a very few mainstream Infocom games (if not the only one) never to appear on the IBM. This foray into the Macintosh market – essentially a massive reworking of an existing product – was part of the company's late-1980s diversification in the wake of its acquisition by Mediagenic, and it was one of the more striking: a delightful hybrid of text adventure, role-playing, and graphic adventure, and one of the first to cater to the then-virginal Mac II market with a third disk of color graphics. It was unlike anything Infocom had tried up to that point, and unlike anything it did since.

It was also intended for the IBM and Apple IIGS. The IBM conversion was 85 to 90 percent complete when Infocom decided not to go ahead with the project. By the time the product was released, the company felt the game would not be competitive in the market, and so Infocom gave the developer leave to try to market the product elsewhere. (It never did surface.)

The label had also done some very preliminary work on a text-and-graphic adventure based around the undersea adventure The Abyss. It never even got to the licensing stage before it was beached in 1990 because of Mediagenic's money problems.

Accolade flyers long touted a handsome point-and-click graphic adventure, full of digitized artwork, called Conspiracy: The Deadlock Files, that was finally dropped last year. (It's a sad story. One programmer fell ill and passed away, and another quit the project.)

MicroIllusions had to sit for years on near-complete IBM games based around Hanna-Barbera's Johnny Quest, Scooby-Doo, and Flintstones cartoons. (However, a Johnny Quest game is expected to surface this fall on the Hollyware label.) Access set aside a follow up to its lively and large action game Crime Wave when the programmer left. Spectrum Holobyte's Sphere of Influence – a Shadow President-like game of global power politics – was shunted aside in fall 1991 for work on Falcon 3.0. (However, it does live on as inspiration for Spectrum's later Crisis in the Kremlin.)

Dynamix has occasionally kicked around the notion of a sequel to its Blade-Runnerish graphic adventure Rise of the Dragon, and that's reportedly still a possibility. But Sierra's recent internal reshuffle and the resulting transplanting of Dynamix adventure-game products to the parent company apparently has pushed the in-production Willie Beamish 2 out of its treehouse. The game's design was complete and it was in production – with most of the artwork ready and work beginning on the key animations – but a good six months of development remained. The game was shaping up to be superior to the original, with improved characterizations and more puzzlesolving.

Your pet game-in-waiting has fallen into the ranks of the disappeared. If it exists, it exists only in old press releases, the back of disk boxes, the dreams of authors, and the last hopes of gamers.

BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME

And Mean Time wasn't alone in Interplay's nitre-encrusted vaults. There's also Dragon Wars II, which was called off in 1991. Dragon Wars, you may recall, was published in 1989 to a warm reception. It was a rather Bard's Tale-like role-playing game with a large view window, strong graphics, open environment, and a pleasant reliance on storytelling.

Dragon Wars II's design was virtually complete. Mock-ups had been drawn of the interface and the programming was just starting up. There was going to be even more emphasis on the story, enhancements to combat and to the interface (the latter to reduce the number of menus – the most common complaint about the original), and additional colleges and spells for magic.

Sounds good, and Interplay thought so, too. "We thought it was a wonderful story at the time," said Interplay's Scott Bennie, the producer of the project. "The sales of the original were nice, but not as good as we wanted," and it was felt it didn't have the necessary "legs" to stand up in the market. Interplay in those days was a smaller company, Dragon Wars II would have required a heavy investment of resources, and the company instead put them into the game that became Star Trek: 25th Anniversary.

"I still have all the notes on file," Ben-

nie said. "I'm hoping that one day we might be able to pull it out of mothballs and work on it again." And for that reason, he wasn't willing to say anything about the storyline.

NEVER SAY DIE

Finally, there's Electronic Arts' Bard's Tale IV project. It was notable, in part, for making use of a variety of points of view: a standard Westwood-style 3-D perspective for movement, a side view for the bulk of complex encounters and combat, and a top-down view within the city.

The story? Ah, well, the story changed en route to non-release. An early version had you as an apprentice bard performing minor quests and discovering in increments that there was "something rotten in the state of Denmark" – something involving your own Bard's guild. A later version sent you off to rescue a kidnapped prince. You had a series of adventures, collected heroes to join you, and uncovered clues that eventually pointed to a fortress where you had to defeat a sorceress who would, in a Dickensian twist, prove to be the princess' sister.

Bard's Tale IV had been about three years in development when it was finally shelved late in the summer of 1992 as the developers sought to bring the game to an "alpha" (rough but working) version. It had proved expensive both in terms of money – "it consumed an incredible amount of money," according to one person who worked on the game – and personnel.

"When it was shut down, I don't think there was anyone on the team – except the guy who wrote the database engine – who started with it," the insider says. "It changed producers. It changed artists. It changed technical directors."

Various explanations have been offered for its demise. One source indicated it was dropped because of differences over the approach. "I think the basic reason was to cut losses," says another who worked on the project. "As I understand it, the project had become an extremely cumbersome piece of software, and the bugs (in the development system) were difficult to fix." The development tools were themselves being developed as the game progressed.

"My understanding was that it was hideously over budget and so hideously over time that a lot of basic programming for it had become outdated," said Dave Arneson, the third in a string of designers to work on the project. "And rather than solving it by spending more money, it was better to write the whole thing off. The engine was severely dated that they would've had to start from scratch."

"The reason given to me was that, with EA's merger with Origin, the EA side couldn't stay cutting edge with itself any longer," said yet another source-who-wouldn't-go-public who worked on the game. "Whatever they could do, the other half could do ten times better and faster."

That said, Bard's Tale IV did not go away completely. It seems the Bard's Tale novels are based on the vanished game. Some things just won't rest in peace. ❑

The Enemy Within was better than half-finished and had cost in the neighborhood of $400,000 by the time the curtain went down at Cinemaware.

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Illustration: Patrick Ho

What's So Funny?

By Joe Hutsko

Part burlesque, part standup bit, part Chevy Chase pratfall. That's comedy on the computer. Here's how the digital ancestors of Uncle Miltie get us to laugh.

Why did the chicken cross the road?

Heard that one? Okay, let me start over. There were these three guys, one a Protestant, one a Catholic....

No, that won't work either. Okay, okay, here's one you'll like. Knock, knock. I said, knock, knock!

Okay, so *I'm* not funny. What is funny, and getting funnier all the time, is the comedy adventure games business. That this genre is hot and getting hotter shouldn't come as any surprise, for we are, after all, a people in search of a good laugh. Consider the cable-ready state of our nation: America's Number One entertainment is Prime Time television (easily the world's biggest joke), a place bursting at the seams with mostly

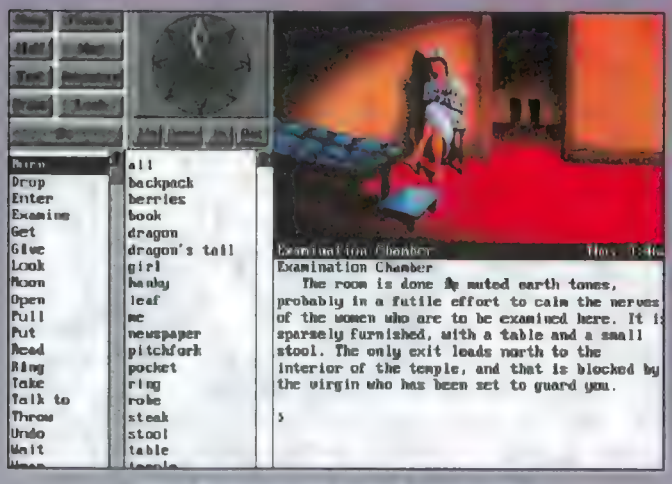
asinine sitcoms, whose writers depend on canned laughter to make them sound funny in case we just don't get it.

Sure, there's the occasional exception to the stupid rule – "Northern Exposure," "Seinfeld," "Roseanne." But the majority of today's sitcoms simply aren't funny. Why are they even there? The bottom line is advertisers. As long as the ever-mysterious Nielson ratings declare "Coke is it" for a particular program's time slot, then stay that program will ... at least until Pepsi (or Sun Chips, or Snapple; pick your favorite brand, for that's how you really vote for what's hot and what's not) steals the show on a competing network.

Computer games, on the other hand, don't rely on advertising to keep them afloat, or canned laughter to make them seem funny when they aren't. In the comedy games business, people shell out anywhere from $25 to $75 for good humor, and the rules are very simple: If a game is truly funny, people will gladly pay to play – and keep paying and playing, since most of today's best-sellers are sequels to early, often low-tech originals. The leading comedy adventure developers know this intimately, and are laughing all the way to the bank.

So what's so funny about today's comedy adventure games? Why do all of their creators seem to be having such a hell of a good time? And how come most rely on comic devices that are often as tired as that old chicken trying to cross the road? We decided to find out.

Most creators of comedy adventures get inspiration from classic comedy venues: TV sitcoms, comedy movies, cartoons, and comic books, to name a few. By and large, take-offs or parodies of popular, long-standing genres

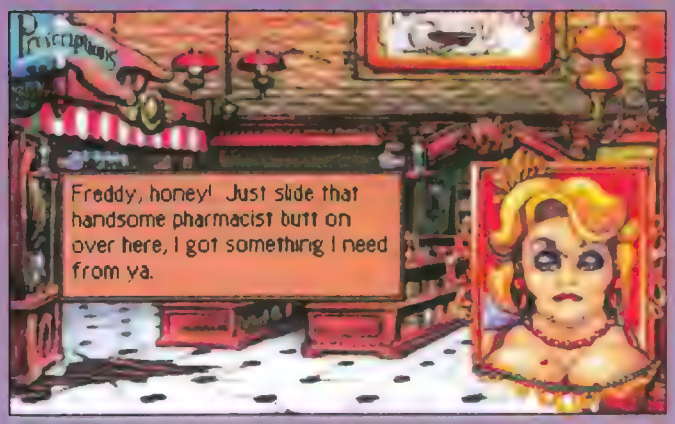


and clichés are the stuff that most of today's favorite comedy adventure games are made of.

Al Lowe, the self-proclaimed great-grandaddy of the comedy games business and father of the lewdly popular

Leisure Suit Larry series, explains. "For Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist, I rented every western classic and comedy I could find. I made a list of things I thought were funny, of all the clichés in Western films." Lowe says that along the way it occurred to him that the genre seemed very stylized, an observation that provided him with a fresh angle. "Instead of making another like all the rest, I asked myself 'Why not parody the style itself?'" And that he did. For instance, instead of casting the "usual" loyal native American Indian sidekick, Freddy's Indian comes from India.

Tony and Meryl Perutz, a husband and wife writing



team, tapped their TV roots and personal experiences to flesh out the story of Dynamix's Willy Beamish. Tony, a former development executive for Warner and one-time program executive at NBC, says he and Meryl got into the comedy gaming business by chance, after leaving Hollywood for the greener pastures of Eugene, Oregon. Meryl, who gave up her role as a VP of sales and marketing for a Hollywood editing and special effects company, explains: "We saw an ad in the paper for comedy writers. We wrote a four-page script instead of a resume, telling them [Dynamix] about ourselves and making fun of their company name. We made fun of Eugene and the lumber industry, figuring it was a good way to get their attention." The pitch paid off, and Dynamix hired the pair to turn a basic premise into the comedy adventure, Willy Beamish.

According to the Perutz's, it's no coincidence that Willy often reminds players of "Dennis the Menace." Says Meryl, "We took the original premise – a mischievous ten-year-old boy living in a town whose residents care about their lawns and Christmas lights more than anything else – and developed the character and script based on suburban life. We thought of everyone we knew from Los Angeles and made fun of them."

Another genre particularly ripe for parody is pulp science fiction. Steve Meretzky, creator of the hit Spellcasting series, says he pokes fun at way the genre "looked" in the '30s in his sexy spoof, Leather Goddess of Phobos. "Some of the humor was satirical, derived from bad clichés: space opera, good guy vs. the bad guy." Illustrating his point, Meretzky cites a scene that takes place in outer space: "You're at one end of the spaceship and you need to get to the other end really fast – by horseback." Sound silly? It is. Which is why it's funny.

More and more, "cartoon" characters are catching on as the inspiration behind some refreshingly original comedy adventures. Steve Purcell, creator of LucasArts' Sam & Max Hit The Road, says he lifted the game's heroic hound and sidekick rabbit from a series of comic books he's published. "My brother used to draw a lot when he was little. He'd leave his books lying around, and I would parody what he'd drawn as comics." LucasArts' Tim Schafer and Dave Grossman, co-creators of Day of the Tentacle, said that although their title was a sequel (to Maniac Mansion), its design is rooted firmly in the cartoon world. Grossman says the project's artist, Peter Chan, drew upon artwork created by Chuck Jones, whose stable of cartoon characters include the "Road Runner," and "Pepe Le Pew." The CD-ROM version of Day of the Tentacle, which features a lively animated introduction and professionally cast voice-over actors, marks the first-ever comedy adventure game to achieve the genuine look and feel of a traditional animated cartoon.

A QUESTION OF CHARACTER

In real life, character is the basis of all good humor. Simply put: A joke isn't funny unless it pokes fun at a person's looks, actions, or reactions. The same rule applies to comedy games. Character is what determines whether a comedy game becomes a hit, and, more importantly, whether it can become an enduring hit with a series of follow-up sequels. Probably the best-loved character in the genre is Larry Laffer, the lounge-lizard antihero of Al Lowe's Leisure Suit Larry series. Gearing

up for his fifth escapade, Shape Up or Slip Out, Lowe says Larry is the kind of character everyone can laugh at. "Embarrassment is a big part of it. I work hard to come up with things to embarrass this guy."

But how far can one go before offending? Meryl Perutz puts it like this: "You don't go around saying nasty things. But on the other hand, there's humor in the differences between people. If you can't laugh at yourself, then there's no humor – everything's the same. While it may not be funny that someone has a lisp, some of the things they say can be very funny. It's not a matter of making fun of it, but of accepting it and finding humor in it."

DEVICES, GENRES AND DELIVERY

According to comedy game creators, choosing a genre and inventing a lead character is the easy part. The hard part is telling a story that will make people laugh. Being funny for the sake of being funny isn't easy. Perhaps that explains why so many comedy games rely on sophomoric humor to get us to laugh.

Chief among the sillies is the pratfall. Mark Crowe, creator of Roger Wilco, the lead in the Space Quest series, explains why. "Games are very visual, so you rely on visual humor to be funny, emphasizing humor with graphics." True: bugged-out eyeballs, banana peel wipeouts, and the ol' frying pan to the face á la Roger Rabbit almost always elicit a chuckle from the player.

As if that isn't enough, slapstick is more often than not allied with a second equally flimsy device: scatological humor. To put it bluntly, outhouses and toilets – no, even more bluntly: what gets flushed down them – wind up in many a comedy adventure. Eric the Unready's Bob Bates says he includes scatological humor in his games, however it's hidden. "The scatological side offers a reward for people whose minds go that way. Others who don't like it will never see it because they're not looking for it." Josh Mandel, who co-created Freddy Pharkas with Al Lowe, cites a different purpose. "I think what makes scatological and bathroom humor so funny on the computer is because the computer itself is a very sophisticated high-tech device – it's all the more shocking and jarring to see third-grade humor coming out of it." Ah. Now we're getting somewhere. It comes down to who's playing these games,

Steve Meretzky puts it best. "The audience is stubbornly teenage, and stubbornly male."

This truism explains why sex – its prospect and promise – runs rampant in so many comedy adventures. As Al Lowe sees it, however, the situation isn't as bad as everyone thinks. "One of the things about Larry is that the sex is played up more in the advertising and on the box than really exists in the game, it's not very dirty or nasty. Yes, there's always innuendo, titillation. I call it 'Benny Hill' humor," referring to the late British comedian. "We've even talked about showing things 'happen,' but in the [video] resolutions we've got to work with, I don't think it would be very exciting. Think what it would look like if you actually saw Larry in a sex scene! Ugh." Agreed. Nonetheless, selling sex – real or imagined – is as important to the comedy adventure game business as it is to

fashion clothes makers and Hollywood studios.

Content aside, comedy game creators say that timing is the biggest challenge in being funny. Unlike stand-up comedy, says Mark Crowe, "you can't jump from one joke to the next; there has to be something in common that binds them to the story. It's very tricky." Tony Perutz agrees. "It's hard to do. Pacing and timing are the two most important things to a standup comedian," he says, pauses, then adds: "next to a paycheck." Josh Mandel,

who worked as a stand-up comic before moving to comedy games, thinks the challenge has a lot to do with duration. "If you're on stage you have maybe an hour if you're lucky; in a computer game it's five or six times that."

Besides knowing how and when to deliver the punch line, there's also repetition to worry about. Says Mandel, "The worst thing you can possibly do to a player is bore them. If you use a generic response any place [in the game] you don't need one, you run the risk of boring them. You have to amuse them all throughout the game." Known in the business as "transitional" humor, Lowe says this was Mandel's biggest contribution to Freddy Pharkas. "Josh spent hundreds of hours writing all those little gags."

LucasArts' Schafer tells a similar story on the making of Day of the Tentacle. "One weekend David [Grossman] and I made a list of every interesting object in the game and cross referenced them with a response for every possible combination. Try to use the brush on the mouse, and you get a funny response."

The Future of Funny

What does the future hold for the comedy game business? On the whole, comedy game creators unanimously believe that more capable computers will make for more enjoyable comedy gaming. "Having a stable platform would be a godsend," says Al Lowe. "I want to do visual puns and auditory gags where I know people will see and hear the effect I'm going for." Bob Bates echoes with a similar opinion. "I think game companies are going to make assumptions about a gamer's hardware that they haven't made in the past. Sound cards is one of them, especially when you look at CD-ROM platforms. Anyone who has one, I'm going to assume has a SoundBlaster [or compatible]."

From a creative standpoint, Meryl and Tony Perutz believe Hollywood will play an important role in the future of comedy games. Says Meryl, "We wrote Willy for the spoken word, even though at the time we didn't know it would was going to eventually come out on SegaCD [with digitized narration]." Adds Tony, "That's what Hollywood will bring to the business. Everyone's worried about all these moguls, but we're enthusiastic, because they'll bring in people who know how to cast. We're going to see a lot of live-action acting."

As for the market, most believe it will eventually mature beyond its current "teenage male" state. Says Josh Mandel, "I think we're making strides there. In a survey we [Sierra] did, we found that 50 percent of Laura Bow II players were women. The first game was only 30 percent, so we've gone up already." The Perutz's said that in their next project they hope to feature a woman as the main character, in a story told from her perspective.

Most also believe that the comedy game market will grow as creators introduce more sophisticated humor into their games. Says Mandel, "I'm hoping in my next game to go beyond scatological and sexual humor. One of the most popular kinds of humor is Jewish humor. I'm Jewish, and I would love to do a Jewish humor game someday – maybe an Indiana Jones-style game with a Woody Allen-type hero, whose mother wishes he would stop rescuing genteel women and rescue a nice Jewish girl instead."

Providing the market takes off, consumer-oriented CD-ROM systems, like those offered by Nintendo, Sega, and 3DO licensees, may be just the ticket to ushering in a wider and more diverse audience of comedy adventure players. Instead of watching sitcoms, we'll play them. Unlike TV today though, because we'll be paying for our "sitcom programming," we'll be the ones who will call the shots on what's hot and what's not, rather than the advertisers.

And that's no joke. ❑

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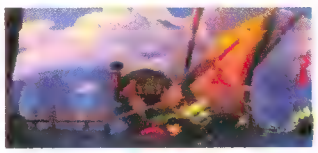

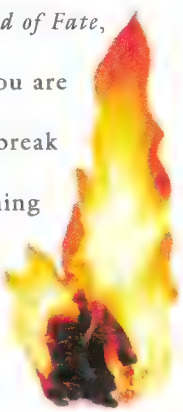

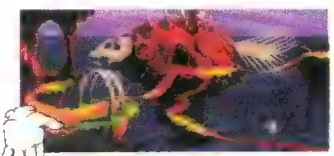

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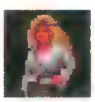

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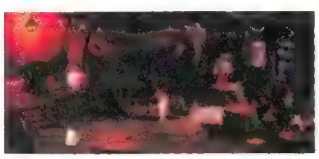

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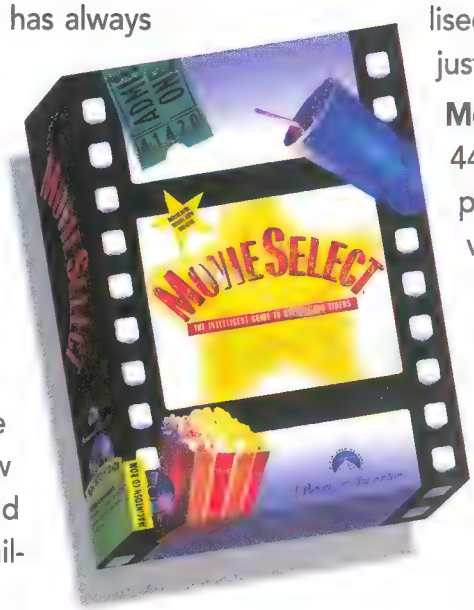

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MACINTOSH: Macintosh LC or higher, System 6.0.7 or greater, 4 MB RAM, color monitor. CD ROM version requires CD ROM drive. Diskette version requires hard disk with 12 MB free.

IBM & COMPATIBLES: 386 machine or higher, 16 MHz processor or higher, 4 MB RAM, VGA card with 256 colors, Windows 3.1 or greater, Mouse, Sound board: Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro or compatible, Speakers. CD ROM version requires CD ROM Drive. Diskette version requires 3.5" 1.44 MB disk drive, hard disk with 12 MB free.

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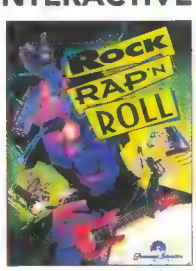

Create music in minutes and jam your socks off.

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PCG REVIEWS

ECOQUEST II: THE LOST SECRET OF THE RAINFOREST

Adam Greene is the planetary protagonist of kid-sized proportions who fights for truth, justice, and mother nature in Sierra's **EcoQuest II: The Lost Secret of the Rainforest.**

This edutainment title for kids manages to offer an entertaining game that's not too heavy-handed or obnoxiously politically correct. But though Rainforest features solid gameplay, and first-rate graphics, animation, and sound, it lacks the charm of its predecessor, EcoQuest: The Search for Cetus.

The ecosystem is in trouble, and it's up to Adam (that's you) to stop the exploitation and destruction of the rainforest. His task is to look for a seedling requested by the Forest Heart, an ancient talking tree that acts as the rainforest's soul. The seedling is vital, for it will ultimately replace the dying Forest Heart. Also involved in the plot is a ruthless corporation that's bent on exploiting the rainforest.

Along the way there are puzzles to solve, including dousing a fire that threatens a bird's nest, opening doors, and getting past brutal insects. During the adventure, you'll also climb trees, explore the rainforest, talk with otters, visit a native village, fly with an eagle, look for the lost city of gold, and converse with a shaman.

The game's 256-color graphics are top-notch. The interface is just as strong, for it relies on Sierra's time-tested icon-based controls.

The program sometimes feels like it's trying to be too many things at once. Compared to the parts where Adam is captured and tied up, cutesy things like talking otters, bats, and birds seem out of place. Sierra treads a fine line here – to play, a child has to be an accomplished reader, but if the program is too cute, it will only turn off older, more sophisticated kids.

The Lost Secret of the Rainforest succeeds as a solid program for youngsters, but it's not up to the standards or whimsy of the first in the series. If you played and enjoyed The Search for Cetus, be prepared for a new attitude.

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Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 978, Oakhurst, CA 93644, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, and Sound Source; mouse and hard-disk drive required; $49.95

EL-FISH

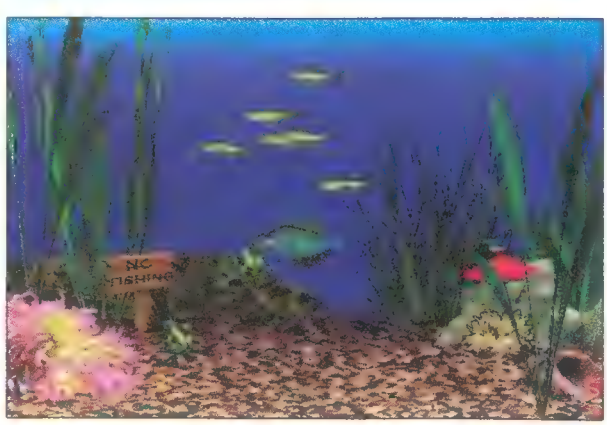
Maxis' **El-Fish** puts a virtual aquarium inside your PC's screen. Here you assemble tanks, breed fish, and add plants and plastic gee-gaws. When it's finished, you sit back and watch the fish swim in 3-D space where movement's natural.

Like a simulation, El-Fish lets you build things, and everything's customizable, from the aquarium itself to the fish that swim around inside it. The tank, for instance, can be edited down to background details such as the color of the pebbles. A library of objects – some fixed, others animated – are available for placement in the tank. Tank occupants range from plants, scuba divers, and sea horses to coral reefs, rocks, and toy castles.

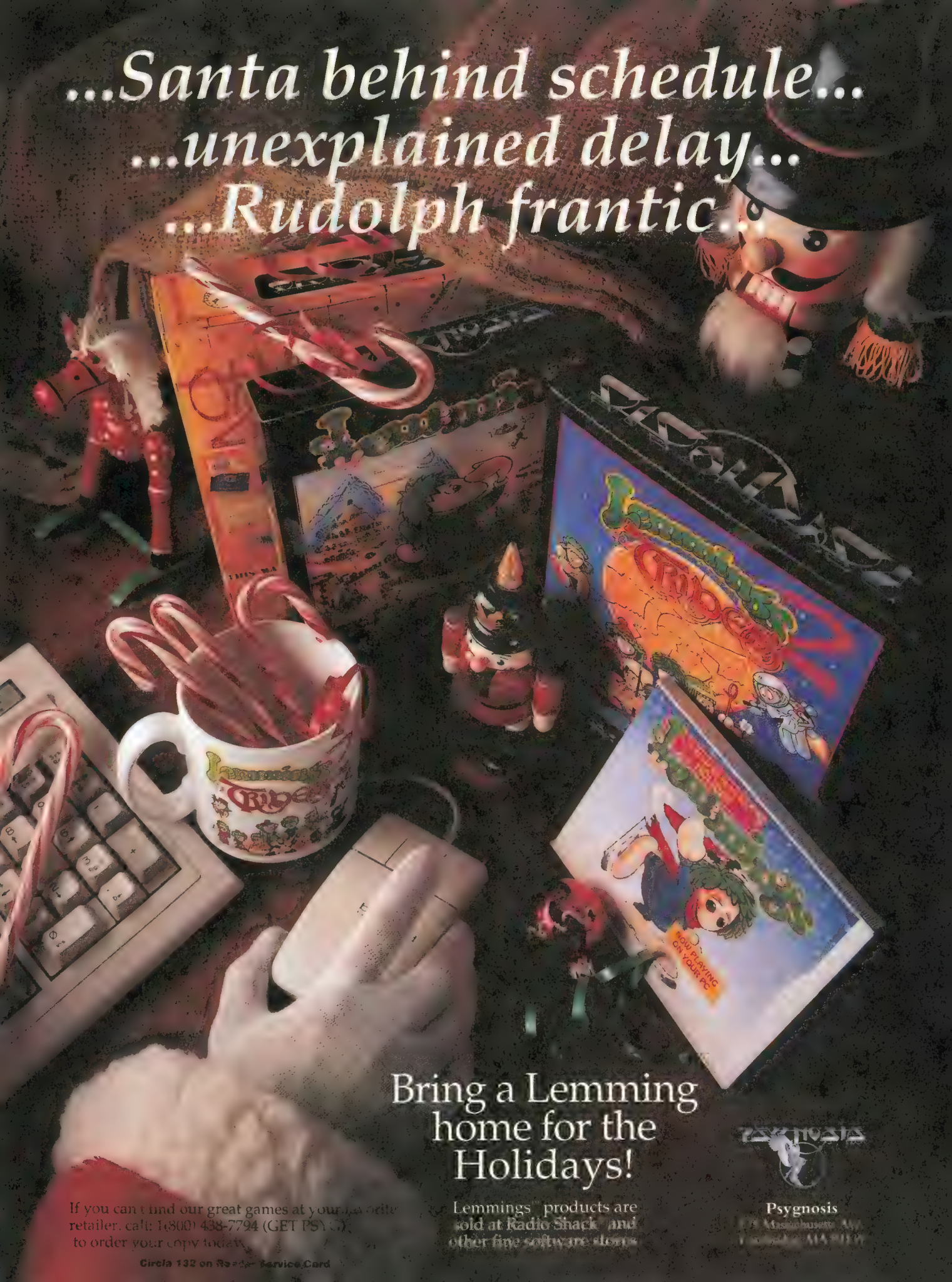
But it's the fish that take center stage. You start the fish-making process by catching fish from the ocean. You can use these fish as is, or you can breed two species to build a new one. And if you want to go for the long term, you can tell the program to evolve it multiple generations. At any time you can pick a fish and tuck it away in your collection.

These fish are static until you animate them. When you do this, you'll find that El-Fish demands monster hardware. On a 486/33, animating a fish takes nearly eight minutes. On a 386/25 (no numeric co-processor), the time stretches to nearly four hours. You won't want to play with El-Fish unless you have a 486, a 386 already matched with a math co-processor, or a lot of time. Other hardware requirements, like 4MB of memory and Super VGA, and are just as stiff.

You can set the fish to music, too, simply by telling El-Fish to generate



Put fish in your computer with El-Fish, a powerful but hardware-intensive simulation of aquatic life.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a computerized soundtrack from eight styles. The sounds are soothing, New Age-like tunes that go well with the meditative qualities of fish watching.

El-Fish isn't a game, but it's loads of the fun. The realistic way that the fish move is astonishing. El-Fish, a software toy of the first order, is such an unusual diviation from the norm that it may spawn an entirely new category.

I can't wait for El-Dog.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Maxis, 2 Theatre Sq., Suite 230, Orinda, CA 94563-3346, (800) 336-2947, (510) 254-9700; IBM PC or compatible (486DX recommended); 4MB RAM; VGA/SVGA (limited support); DOS 3.3 or later; supports AdLib, Roland MT-32, and SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive with at least 10MB free space required; mouse required; math coprocessor recommended on 386-based systems; $69.95

ERIC THE UNREADY

What an airy, happy piece of writing is **Eric the Unready.** Whether the subject is the muck under the privy in this text-and-graphics adventure or the variation on Dana Carvey's ornery-old-man routine, author Bob Bates is always right in there with something pithy. This is another funny adventure from a guy who's good at 'em.

When the dysfunctional young knight Eric tells a disagreeable tree that he'd get by if he were Sir Lancelot, you know the tree's going to come back with *"I knew Sir Lancelot, I worked with Sir Lancelot, and believe me, you're no Sir Lancelot."* And the gags keep coming. Eric's full of a writer's sweetly reckless pleasure. It's a spirit preserved in the music, the warm graphics, and the Boris Vallejo cover.

Eric's actually not so much unready as unlucky and uncoordinated – a sort of literal version of the knight errant who's forever setting off Rube Goldberg-like chain reactions. Eric is a most unlikely candidate for this assortment of quests, which culminates in the search for a range of oddly-named semi-mythological objects and a kidnapped princess.

It's not the sort of thing to inspire gales of ho-ho-ho boardroom laughter; more a conspiracy of gentle chuckles. The game has a quiet, purposeful confidence, and you'll invariably leave feeling slightly tickled, no matter how knotty the puzzle. Nor are the puzzles too tough, at least until Day Six. That doubtless owes something to the logic of their solutions – which will elude you just long enough to be interesting.

Eye of the Beholder III may be more of the same, but who's complaining?

Moreover, Legend's vaunted point-and-click interface has subtly improved with augmentation of the verbs and nouns columns. This turns the verbs column in particular into a de facto on-line hint book.

It's all perfectly enjoyable, and nothing particularly new. Funny? Sure. A new routine? Not quite.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Legend Entertainment, 14200 Park Meadow Dr., Chantilly, VA 22021, (800) 658-889, (703) 222-8500; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA/SVGA (VESA-compatible); supports AdLib, Roland MT-32, and SoundBlaster soundboards and RealSound; mouse recommended; $59.95

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER III: THE ASSAULT ON MYTH DRANNOR

When something's not broken, even game creators won't bother fixing it. That attitude makes SSI's **Eye of the Beholder III: The Assault on Myth Drannor** no more than the third in a series.

With no major changes and with many of its improvements only cosmetic, Eye of the Beholder III is by no means state-of-the-art. Still, if you liked the first two pieces of the Eye lineup, you may want to keep your heroes a-questin' here.

With excellent graphics, a point-and-click interface, and the familiarity of the TSR Advanced Dungeons & Dragons game world and rules, Eye of the Beholder III is almost identical to its predecessors. As in SSI's Gold Box series, this game lets you bring your party from Eye II in the continuing quest to rid the world of evil.

Eye III is a bit easier to play, but SSI skimped on Eye III's development. Logical additions such as automapping simply aren't here. The graphics, at least, are well done and feature 256-color VGA images that sport the deep, rich look characteristic of this series. Although there are more plot-advancing scenes than in previous installments, the game engine itself is still the old Move 10 system, which now looks dated.

Eye III uses a drag-and-drop interface, an elegant solution to inventory management. Ditto with actions, for you simply double-click on a spell book to cast magic from a large list. As in the previous installments, the focus of the game is still combat. Interminable combat.

And unfortunately the puzzle-solving remains primitive, and potentially time-consuming and tedious. Relying

on the typical pressure plates, teleportation squares, and find-the-right-object obstacles, Eye III proves to be fairly easy to anyone smarter and better organized than the average barbarian.

Tag Eye of the Beholder III as an adequate game. The plot's acceptable, the graphics excellent, and the interface smooth. This business-as-usual attitude leaves us with nothing substantive to distinguish Eye III from its forbears – other than bigger and badder monsters to fight. Eye of the Beholder III: The Assault on Myth Drannor will play to the same audience as its ancestors.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, (800) 245-4525, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible (20MHz 386 or faster); 2MB RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; mouse required; $69.95

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III

In the tradition of its two predecessors, MicroProse's **F-15 Strike Eagle III** utilizes today's powerful PC technology to set you in the cockpit of a modern jet fighter. You'll need to bring a hot computer to these missions, along with all the talents, reflexes, and composure demanded of a United States Air Force fighter pilot.

Stunning new visuals are the biggest change to this third-in-a-series flight sim. You will fly in a 3-D world featuring enhanced terrain details and surrounded by new sounds and digitized cockpit speech.

Equipping your war bird is part of your job, and matching the right ordinance to the task at hand is as easy as pointing and clicking. A flexible weapons platform, the F-15 can handle several types of air-to-ground and air-to-air bombs and missiles. A joystick is a must for an accurate rendition of piloting a jet, but many flight controls can be accessed on the keypad. Just learning where everything is takes time.

An accurate version of the Desert Storm operation comes in the form of an Iraq Scenario, in which you fly all four phases of the air war: disruption of air defense and communications facilities, ground strikes against SAM sites and missile batteries, destruction of other ground targets, and the Great Scud Hunt. The Desert Storm Scenario requires accurate bombing skills and precise, low-altitude flying. Other missions put you in the skies over Korea or above the Panama Canal Zone. Such scenarios represent possible areas of future conflict. Two-player mode pits you against your fellow aces in head-to-head aerial combat over the modem lines. Completing missions successfully advances your rank, and finishing missions in outstanding fashion earns you medals.

You may have to create a boot disk to free up enough RAM to run this simulation, which is realistic enough to test your flight skills but slick enough to be more fun than work. F-15 Strike Eagle III is one helluva simulation.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster); 2MB RAM with EMS; VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, and SoundBlaster; $79.95

FOLLOW THE READER WITH MICKEY MOUSE

M-I-Seeeee. K-E-Whyyyyy. His name, of course, is Mickey Mouse, star of stage, screen, and educational software. **Follow the Reader with Mickey Mouse,** Walt Disney Computer Software's latest release, helps kids aged 4 to 7 to create self-running PC movies and printed, ready-to-color storybooks featuring a cast of enduring Disney characters.

Follow the Reader sports an easy-to-use, kid-style interface. If you use that other kind of mouse, budding story writers won't have to type a single word. Instead, children select action words (verbs) and names of people, places, and things (nouns) from scrolling word windows which appear at the bottom of each colorful, animated screen.

Because Follow the Reader provides sentence starters, composing a sentence is as easy as pointing and clicking. For example, the program's introductory sentence is, *One fine day Mickey woke up and _____ and _____.* Instead of seeing the blanks, though, the child sees scrolling boxes on the computer screen, and each box contains a series of appropriate words. Each new scene offers a new sentence-to-be. Before they know it, kids have a finished story.

When you press the Enter key (or click the right mouse button), a narrator with a pleasant and reassuring voice reads each sentence aloud.

Children can preserve their Mickey Mouse stories for later replay. When you load a saved story, the narrated version unfolds automatically – almost like a Disney feature film. You can also print out a story, color its graphics by hand, bind the pages, and share your book with a friend.

No matter how you look at it, Follow the Reader with Mickey Mouse offers a lot for both parents and kids. Suffice it to say that this title teaches kids a lot more than just sentence structure and reading readiness. The program's animated color graphics, nifty soundtrack, subtle humor, and its open-ended learning environment add up to real family value. Or as Mickey himself might say, "Gee, this is swell!"

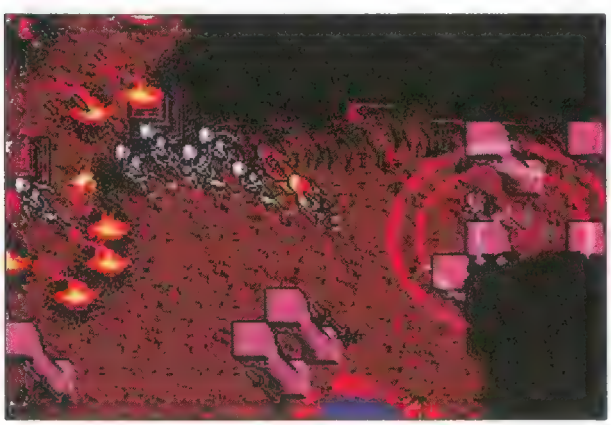
NOT RATED

Walt Disney Computer Software, Inc., 500 S. Buena Vista St., Burbank, CA 91521, (800) 688-1520; IBM PC or compatible (12MHz or faster); 640K RAM (560K RAM free); DOS 3.3 or later; EGA/VGA/Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, IBM PS/1 Audio Card, SoundBlaster, and Sound Source; hard-disk drive required; $49.95 ($69.95 with Sound Source)

FORGE OF VIRTUE

It's hard to imagine anyone wishing for an even larger Britannia – but that's just what Origin has gone and given us. **The Forge of Virtue,** an add-in disk for Ultima VII: The Black Gate, raises a new island within the mother game and invests it with four new quests.

As you'd expect, Forge of Virtue is very much of a piece with Ultima VII – the same astonishing depth, in-your-parlor intimacy, and in-your-face immediacy. At first, though, it doesn't seem more than a belch in Ultima VII terms. Forge of Virtue adds only about a megabyte to your hard disk.



Add Forge of Virtue to Ultima VII and you'll expand your role-playing horizons.

Then you walk through the Moongates and into the quests, and you begin to wonder how they squeezed it all in. Suffice to say you'll learn a lot about some old enemies, solve a rash of puzzles, and witness at least one utterly spectacular scene.

Forge of virtue fits very snugly into Ultima VII. The seams don't show, and if you didn't know of the existence of this Ultima McNugget beforehand, you'd never suspect it was anything other than part and parcel of the mother game.

Still, Forge of Virtue pretty much stands as a separate unit within the game, and its quests are very much quests for the sake of quests rather than integral parts of the story. It may not look like a data disk, but it sure feels like one.

And for a game whose creators so dearly love sending players hither and yon in search of solutions, the introduction to the island is disappointingly straightforward. But these laments doesn't amount to more than a few loose nuts on the sundae that is Ultima VII. The Forge of Virtue is a solid addition to a wonderful game.

NOT RATED

Origin, 110 Wild Basin Rd., Suite 230, Austin, TX 78746, (800) 999-4939; IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); Ultima VII: The Black Gate; 2MB RAM; 256-color VGA; hard-disk drive with more than 21MB free space required; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, and Sound Blaster Pro (music and sound effects); supports SoundBlaster (digitized speech); mouse recommended; $24.99

FREDDY PHARKAS, FRONTIER PHARMACIST

Sierra brings us is the good, the bad, and the frontier pharmaceuticals in its uproarious adventure, **Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist**. Freddy is a former gun slinger, who, after getting his ear shot off in a gunfight, decides to go straight, attend college, and become a mild-mannered pharmacist.

Pharkas is another of Sierra's 3-D interactive adventure games where you walk around, gather objects, figure out the puzzles, and rid the area of its bad guys (in this case, the Lever brothers). Sierra's time-tested graphic interface lets you easily perform any action using your mouse. Use the eye icon to look around and examine objects, a hand to take or use things, and a talking icon to speak with other characters.

What would John Wayne or Clint Eastwood do if they ran into some of the situations Freddy finds himself in? There's the wrong end of some sick horses that make Freddy pass out, a stampeding herd of wayward escargots that slimes the town if it isn't stopped, and long lines (and desperate townspeople) in front of the outhouses. Yes, the jokes do manage to get out of the bathroom, and there are a lot of witty gags and one-liners throughout the game.

Not only does Pharkas provide plenty of laughs, but it also serves up some challenging puzzles. Be sure to brush up your chemistry, because throughout the game, you'll prepare prescriptions and mix formulas.

But can a past gunslinger make it as a pharmacist in a Western town? There's an evil undercurrent in the town, and reluctantly, our hero takes up gunslinging again. Here the game offers arcade shooting segments.

Freddy Pharkas does an excellent job of capturing the Western theme, then playing with it. Freddy himself is a melodramatic good guy who's out to do his best, complete with smile and shining teeth.

As adventure games go, Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist is an entertaining jaunt, flush with good characters, funny situations, and some mind-bending puzzles. It's a solid game throughout. In the end, you and Freddy will have earned your well-deserved rides into the sunset.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 978, Oakhurst,

Sierra's Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist takes you back to the Old West, but its gags are strictly Leisure Suit Larry-like.

CA 93644, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, Microsoft Sound System, Pro-Audio Spectrum, and SoundBlaster; mouse recommended (Windows version requires a 386SX or faster, Windows 3.1 or later, and 2MB RAM); $69.95

GATEWAY

The Heechee, an ancient space-faring race, vanished long ago. A small satellite has been discovered in orbit around our sun, and it's packed with abandoned mini-spaceships programmed with destinations.

Now, foolhardy prospectors risk everything to try out those destinations. A few locate strange, indecipherable Heechee artifacts and return to sell them to megacorporations for enormous wealth. As the hero of **Gateway,** you play one of these prospectors. Your encounters – which range from the casual to the downright homicidal – form the centerpiece of this game.

Gateway does justice to science fiction's potential and offers a credible storyline and believable characters. The game is also given a leg up because it's inspired by Frederick Pohl's best-selling novels.

Gateway conjures up the seediness and triviality of 21st-century Earth and its overdeveloped industrial civilization, and contrasts it with the civilization of the unknown and the technologically godlike Heechee.

Legend chose cleverly to go all the way when putting this one together. Thus Gateway offers not only high-res, 256-color VGA art, but high-res 800-by-600 super VGA, too. Gateway's soundtrack is just as good.

Progress in Gateway means completing a variety of puzzles successfully. At their simplest level, they require little more than common sense and an ability to follow directions. Also, Gateway introduces a third kind of puzzle, which is more fiendishly difficult than anything Legend has offered before.

Dialogue, situations, graphics, sound, and virtual realities combine to make Legend's Gateway not only an excellent translation of science-fiction prose, but a terrific game in its own right.

NOT RATED

Legend Entertainment Company, 14200 Park Meadow Dr., Chantilly, VA 22021, (703) 222-8500; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM (SVGA/VGA); 512K RAM (EGA/CGA); DOS 2.1 or later; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster sound boards, and RealSound; $59.95

GODS

In Konami's **Gods,** you can live forever – if you can run, jump, shoot, think, and steal fast enough. Not strictly an arcade game, Gods fits more comfortably into the arcade-strategy category, where fast thinking is as richly rewarded as a fast finger on the joystick button. Hindered only by its pathetic documentation and lack of a save-game feature, Gods delivers plenty of stylish, frantic excitement.

Gods plays loosely off the storyline of the Olympian gods of ancient Greece. In Konami's retelling, the gods created a huge paradise for themselves on Earth. Unfortunately, the city was invaded by the forces of darkness when it was left unoccupied by its citizens. In a rash moment, the Olympians promised to grant one wish to the human who could evict the new residents and give them back their home. Only Hercules came forward, and he wanted immortality.

You step into Hercules' skin and rampage across four different and unfriendly environments: the City, the Temple, the Labyrinth, and the Underworld. You get three lives in a round, and losing one returns you to a spot near your fatal mistake. After you kill a Guardian, you receive a password. Type it in, and Hercules starts on the first level, of the next environment.

There's plenty of arcade-style action in Gods, which has the usual layered maze of rooms, trap doors, and ladders. Expect to tangle with strange, dromedary-like death dealers and vicious flying harpies. But you'll need to think, too, if you're to locate secret passages, buy special potions, find better weapons, and solve the game's timed puzzles.

But the greatest challenge in Gods isn't part of the game at all. It's trying to figure out how to work the thing. That the documentation is weak is an understatement.

Gods is certainly worth a look. The movement is lifelike, the animation is relatively smooth, and the VGA artwork is excellent. Even if the quest for immortality is something you don't mind putting off for a weekend or two, Gods provides plenty of thrills for the novice and arcade expert alike.

NOT RATED

Konami, 900 Deerfield Pkwy. Buffalo Grove, IL 60089, (708) 215-5111; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 2.1 or later; EGA/VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; $39.95

GREAT NAVAL BATTLES OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC

With **Great Naval Battles of the North Atlantic,** SSI enters the graphic simulation arena without abandoning the strategic and statistical elements on which its reputation rests. This mixture enhances game play, but the result isn't without some flaws.

From the Flag Bridge, you command all the ships in your task force. A tactical map displays the area of operations, as well as current course, speed, and system status. The numerous interactive stations on board the warships in your fleet range from the Main Gun Room and Navigation to Damage Control. From the on-deck observation post you can pan to see the other ships in your formation, or you can spot any enemy within visual range.

It's fun to take manual control at the Navigation station and chase down an enemy vessel. Once it's within range of your big guns, shift Navigation to automatic and take control of your artillery. You can always be where the action is.

Another way to play is to stay at one station for the duration of a battle. Play only the main turrets and feel what it was like to sit inside a can firing 13-inch shells all day.

The career naval officer will no doubt want to have control of all ship's systems. But be warnerd: it takes careful concentration to remember which hat you're wearing in this game, and in the heat of battle you're likely to find yourself commanding the main guns on an escort ship while the rest of your fleet flounders without a leader.

Operational-level games give you control over a few surface units, and the campaign scenario covers the first four years of the war.

The best of SSI's strategic prowess is preserved in Great Naval Battles. While the hands-on simulation allows operation of day-to-day ship duties – firing main guns and putting out fires – you must also create your navy's overall strategy. This is a typically satisfying SSI war game, with the addition of great graphics and tactical operations.

NOT RATED

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible; 571K RAM and 700K EMS RAM; VGA; hard-disk drive with at least 8.5MB free space required; mouse required; $69.95

GREENS

MicroProse's **Greens** is just what the pro ordered. This instructional golf game not only has a thing or two to teach you, but it provides plenty of fun as well.

Greens serves up a challenging round of golf – so challenging, in fact, that the game's handicap feature serves you well as you work your way toward scratch status.

Greens' graphics images aren't as detailed as those in Access' Links, but they're more than passable. The trade-off between the lack of total course detail and quick screen redraws is more than worth it to those of us who want to spend time shooting birdies, not pictures. The interface is accessible and solid. Almost every option you need is on the shot screen and only a click away. From there you can set tee height, position yourself within the blocks, and adjust your stance.

The swing bar is wrapped around the golfer and travels accurately along the arc of the club face. You have to develop a feel, and once you do play is consistent and solid. Greens' most unique swing feature is its variable sweet spot; its size differs depending on club selection and the amount of power in the swing.

Too bad MicroProse didn't put as much effort into Greens' putting. Although putting is consistent and lining up the putt is realistic, things fall apart when you shoot, then watch the ball in an inaccurate close-up.

Greens lets you play in a variety of matches, including Skins, Threeball, Fourball, and Tournament.

Perhaps one of the best parts of this package is thorough its manual. Created with David Leadbetter's help, the documentation is a nice hybrid of game instruction and pure golf instruction.

If you're into golf, either on the links or in front of the monitor, pick up Greens. The game play is solid, challenging, and to the point. Play it long enough, and you may learn enough to shave some strokes off your real game – if you can tear yourself away from your computer.

Greens is good golf, though its course detail can't match Links 386 Pro.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib and Roland; mouse recommended; $59.95

HARPOON DESIGNERS' SERIES: BATTLESET ENHANCER

Three-Sixty's **Harpoon Designers' Series: Battleset Enhancer** adds 12 new Harpoon scenarios for every battleset you already own, and it updates Harpoon itself with dozens of new countries, hundreds of new weapons platforms, and an upgrade to the Harpoon master game.

Harpoon is the most realistic naval-warfare simulation available. It's sold more than 80,000 copies and is backed up with three additional battlesets and a scenario editor. Harpoon's fans support newsletters, bulletin boards, and active on-line clubs.

And, in fact, Battleset Enhancer is very much a product of those fans. Avid Harpoon players submitted scenario ideas to Three-Sixty even before the scenario editor was released.

Adding new countries means adding whole new navies to Harpoon. To the Greenland/Iceland/United Kingdom Battleset included with the master game, Battleset Enhancer adds Sweden, Poland, Germany, and Finland. New bases are added to each battleset, along with more weapons.

The *Gonzo Station* scenario for the Indian Ocean & Persian Gulf Battleset represents an Iraqi power play that doesn't stop at Kuwait. There's also the *First Eurasian War* (1996 to 1999). All scenarios emphasize the changing political tensions in this post–Cold War era.

The Soviet/CIS aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetzov,* the U.S. *Ohio*-class ballistic-missile submarine, and the USN SV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft are just some of the new weapons included in this add-on. Fully compatible with the scenario editor, each new weapon performs in the new scenarios and is available for use when creating your own war games.

Armchair admirals can consider each weapons platform as fodder for the scenario editor, even though you can't edit the weapons themselves. Whatever edition of Harpoon you now own, this package upgrades the game to the current version, 1.3.

If you're not yet a Harpooner, look for the Challenger Pack, a boxed set that includes everything except Battleset Enhancer. You get Harpoon, all the battlesets, and the scenario editor for only $79.95.

A large part of players' fascination with Harpoon is its realistic feel. At $49.95, Battleset is a steal.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Three-Sixty Pacific, 2105 S. Bascom Ave., Suite 165, Campbell, CA 95008, (800) 653-1360; IBM PC or compatible; EGA/VGA; Harpoon 1.2 or later required; $49.95

HARRIER ASSAULT

Just like the aircraft it's based on, **Harrier Assault** is a hybrid that tries to be both flight simulator *and* strategy game. But in the end, it's less than satisfying as either.

The Harrier is a vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) aircraft. Tilting thrusters direct the engine's power at any angle. Hovering is possible, and even when carrying heavy loads, the Harrier only needs a short takeoff or landing run.

Domark's Harrier Assault presents the complex challenge of this airplane in a flight simulation that's coupled with strategic elements. You order missions, but you prove yourself by flying missions.

In the strategic section of the game, you plan interdiction missions and launch attacks to soften the enemy before the Marines hit the beach. A standard strategy map of the area fills the screen. You select way-points and targets but have limited control in other operations. As each mission of the battle plan begins, you have the opportunity to fly it yourself.

Though the challenges of a successful strategy are engaging, the real action – the flight simulator half of this combo – is more satisfying. The cockpit and heads-up displays are realistic, and all manner of electronics are available for targeting, navigation, and defensive radar.

Once mastered, the Harrier's agility is intriguing. Popping up undetected from behind mountains and firing a deadly salvo at enemy targets will prove the effectiveness of this assault plane.

You might tire of the pyramid mountains and minimal ground detail seen through the cockpit window. Flight simulator purists may want to add this aircraft to their repertoire and hope for improved graphics in the next version. Only the challenge of flying a VTOL makes up for this game's dull scenery.

Harrier tries to meld disparate elements that break up the action rather than enhance it. Good thing that the *real* Harrier works better than this digital copy.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Domark, 1900 S. Norfolk St., Suite 202, San Mateo, CA 94403, (408) 296-7933; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; $59.95

HIGH COMMAND

In **High Command,** a WWII strategy simulation, you'll balance economics and politics against the demands of military campaigning.

High command isn't a detailed war game but a simulation that puts you in charge of production, supply, diplomacy and combat. Its synergy of home-front concerns and neutral countries' "feelings" will demand your attention when the world is at war and you're in charge.

All the same, High Command looks like a typical war game. In this almost all-mouse game, you view a strategic map surrounded by a palette of buttons from which you click to conquer.

Though High Command features almost 40 countries to fight, or fight with, this sim's not strictly historical.

Of course, you'll direct military campaigns, set naval blockades, and launch attacks. But High Command makes an effort to remove you from the front lines. The closest you'll get to the virtual bullets is an examine-site mode that shows you frontline terrain and weather conditions. Rather than squat in the trenches, you'll be busy running the factories and fawning over foreign dignitaries.

You must spark the economy and pump production to wartime levels. Factories can be tooled to produce tanks and planes, but money spent on research and development might provide bigger rewards later. If you don't reinvest in your economy, you risk recession. You have to balance budgeting for immediate efforts and spending money on long-range goals.

High Command makes you play with resources and diplomats, not just tanks and airplanes.

Diplomacy plays its part, too. You can try to woo neutral countries to your side and allocate intelligence resources to perform sabotage against your enemies or break their military codes. When all else fails, you can declare war.

It may be lonely at the top, but you won't be forgotten at your desk job. War's hell when it's a numbers game.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Three-Sixty Pacific Software, 2105 S. Bascom Ave., Suite 165, Campbell, CA 95008, (409) 776-2187; IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); 3MB RAM; VGA/SVGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster sound boards; mouse required; $69.95

HONG KONG MAJONG PRO

Hong Kong Majong Pro, a majong tile game come to the hard disk, is one of the best translations of a classic to the PC.

Hong Kong Majong Pro's VGA graphics make its tiles, game board, and opponents pop from the screen. Its audio makes play nearly interactive, for the computer players celebrate or bemoan their loss. And its play mechanics make it suitable for everyone, from newcomers to old hands at this traditional Chinese game. Hong Kong Majong Pro will give you hours of entertaining solitary play.

Electronic Arts took pains to provide an accurate representation of Majong, and it models this PC version after the gambling game played today in Hong Kong. Similar in some ways to rummy, majong instead uses "hands" of tiles, which you play in an attempt to accumulate a winning hand before someone else beats you to it. You can build a winning hand in any of several different ways, but the three most common are the combinations Chow (three tiles of a suit), Pong (four tiles of a suit), and Kong (four matched tiles). Majong also offers a number of other winning tile combinations which take skill or luck to collect.

Hong Kong Majong Pro plays tough. Fortunately, you can pick opponents to suit your skills with 12 electronic players.

The Spirit of Majong (a sparrow) is always ready to offer help when it's your turn. The Spirit gives only elementary assistance – it points out which tile to discard – so you can't ignore the manual or the tutorial. Both on-screen instructions and manual are excellent, patient and explicit, so that even novices have ample instruction before taking on the game's built-in opponents.

As an exercise for experienced majong players, Hong Kong Majong Pro provides worthy adversaries and a game that plays exactly as it would with real tiles and dice. Hong Kong Majong Pro is, more than anything, a game you can grow to love in a short time. It's challenging, fun, and a welcome change from endless rounds of that old standby solitaire.

NOT RATED

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 3.0 or later; VGA/SVGA; supports AdLib, Roland, ProAudio Spectrum, and SoundBlaster; $49.95

INCA

Sierra's **Inca** has you traveling through time and space to restore the vanquished Incan Empire, and along the way, you wreak some vengeance on conquistadors who smashed

Inca's pretty, but the pictures can't make up for a weak adventure.

through South America in a frenzied search for gold and glory.

You play El Dorado, hero of ancient prophecy, battling the Spaniard Aguirre and his band of *intergalactic* conquistadors. According to the story, the last great Inca ruler, Huayna Capac, foresaw the invasion and, before his death, hid the real treasures of the Incan empire. They're squirreled away throughout the universe, far away from the conquistadors' grubby hands. Your task? Gather the treasures to restore the empire to its glories. Oh yeah, Aguirre and his men, driven by a 500-year-old greed, are still trying to get the jewels.

The graphics, including lots of digitized images, are first-rate, and Sierra thought enough of the Andean-flavored musical soundtrack that accompanies the action to offer it on a audio CD. The other sound effects are nice, too, and enhance the realism.

Inca combines arcade action with complex mazes and puzzles to offer adventurers an entertaining variety. You cruise deep space in your Tumi fighter and fend off whatever hazards – from meteor showers to Aguirre's starfighters – get in your way. As a flight sim, it's simplistic, but the combat in the upper levels will definitely test your mouse or joystick skills.

Inca sounds like it offers a nice mix: an engaging plot, arcade action, dangerous mazes, and mind-busting puzzles. Unfortunately, the whole is not equal to the sum of its parts. The arcade action is interesting – sometimes it's even challenging – but it's never awesome. The mazes may keep you wandering for a while, but they are finite, and you'll find the key rooms soon enough. At least some of the puzzles are brain busters, although they're more trial-and-error stumpers, not logic puzzles. If you're persistent, and you just keep trying things, it will eventually work.

The plot is clever, and the graphics and sound are first-rate, but in the end, Inca is just another example of game developers spending more time creating high-tech razzle-dazzle than on good old game play.

1 2 3 4 **5** 6 7 8 9 10

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 978, Oakhurst, CA 93644, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (20MHz 386 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, and Thunderboard; mouse required; $59.95

THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE

The Incredible Machine really isn't a machine at all until you put it together. You start with a collection of parts and pieces, and through a series of 75 puzzles, assemble an incredible machine using ropes, pulleys, levers, gears, and any outrageous combination of the components in your bin.

Most of the contraptions you build resemble a Rube Goldberg cartoon. They're filled with ramps and levers, bouncing balls, windmills and billows, magnifying glasses that refract light to ignite fuses, mice running on treadmills to generate electricity, gears, ropes, rollers, conveyer belts, and trampolines. All this to accomplish the simple task at hand.

These incredible machines are delightfully wacky widgets that are as fun to watch in action as they are to create. Upon completing each puzzle, you receive a password, which lets you load previously completed puzzles without going through the entire sequence again.

The bits and pieces appear in the tool bin on the right side of the screen. Each puzzle provides the appropriate types and numbers of parts to complete the machine successfully, so you always have what it takes.

If you tire of the puzzles, you can build in free-form mode. This is where your incredible machines can get really out of hand. Besides having the entire arsenal of incredible parts at your disposal, you can also adjust the gravity and atmospheric pressure of the machine environment. You don't even need to have a task or goal in mind to have fun in free-form mode.

The accompanying music is fabulous, with each puzzle playing its own jazzy soundtrack in the background. You're graded on time as well as completion. The Incredible Machine takes patience, a clever eye, and careful placement of pieces.

It's a bizarre combination of arcade frenzy and strategy that'll keep you coming back. Get plenty of shut-eye now, then start dreaming up some of those incredible machines.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Sierra/Dynamix, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland MT32, SoundBlaster, and Thunderboard; mouse required; $49.95

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS

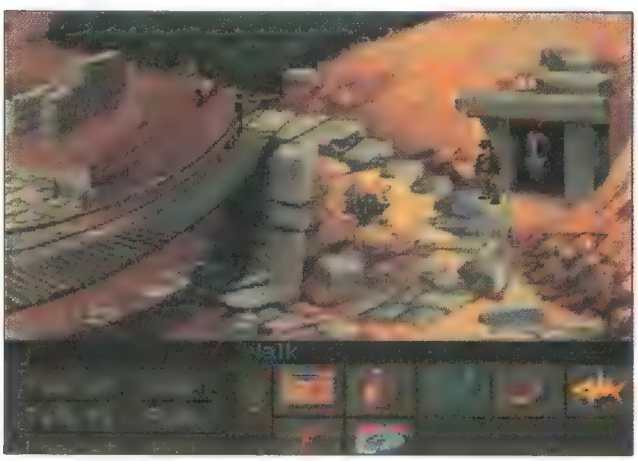
Grab your whip, hat, and leather jacket. You're going to team up with your favorite snake- and Nazi-hating archaeologist – Indiana Jones. Indy's on the VGA monitor this time, and he's on another adventure to save the world from those villainous Aryans of the 1930's in the search for the Lost City of Atlantis.

Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis is the most complex adventure game to come from LucasArts, and it's worth it. The graphics are first-rate, the background audio support movielike, and the plot and characters intriguing.

LucasArts seems to have had one goal in mind as it designed Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis: playability. Just as Indy plays his hunches in film, you do the same here as you search museums, archeological dig

sites, and exotic Mediterranean locations. And Indy's not alone. His side-kick is a former love interest, Sophia Hapgood. Sophia's slashing wit and underlying cynicism make her relationship with Indy fun to follow. Of course, the Germans are close behind.

Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis is not just one game but three. You can play with Sophia at your side on the Team Path; take the Wits Path if you like detective work; or work the action-packed Fists Path, where Indy plays antagonist with everyone. Whichever path you pick, all lead to Atlantis. It's there that the game becomes the most complex.



Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis – whether you get the floppy or CD – is top-notch adventure entertainment.

LucasArts has worked hard to retain the flavor of the adventures we've come to expect from Professor Jones. But the company's also assembled a fine example of graphic adventuring. Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis is a lot of fun to play. I punched out the bad guys. I discovered clues that led to the Lost City. And all the while, all I could think of is, "This is great!"

NOT RATED

LucasArts, P.O. Box 2009, San Rafael, CA 94912, (800) 782-7927; IBM PC or compatible; 540K RAM; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster, and Roland; hard-disk drive with at least 20MB free required; $59.95

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS, CD-ROM

Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis, CD-ROM takes advantage of its compact disc format to provide thousands of lines of dialog and digitized sound effects. Combine those with an excellent graphic adventure that plays in the same spirit as the movies for which it's named, and you have a game worth playing.

With Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis you race against the Nazis to discover the secrets of the lost continent of Atlantis. The story starts with Indy searching for a former colleague in adventure, Sophia Hapgood. previously, they worked together on a dig where they uncovered artifacts that might prove to be Atlantean in origin. The Atlanteans used a strange metal as the energy source for their engines, and now the Germans are hunting for this uranium substitute.

The game itself is easy to play. Each line of dialog comes from your speakers and adds a new dimension to the experience. Its graphics aren't quite up to that level, however. Jones is just recognizable with his hat and leather jacket, and everyone ends up looking like a cartoon character.

At a certain point, Indiana can adopt three ways of solving this adventure – the team approach, by working with Sophia; the wits approach, leaving Sophia and going solo; and the fists approach, which requires more violence. Regardless which approach you choose, the game is well-balanced.

The interface is tight. Various action buttons, like Look, Open, and Touch, are grouped in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen, and a would-be Indiana can click on the button, then an object on the screen – no typing's required. The puzzles aren't difficult (though hardly pushovers), and the CD-ROM edition contains a cluebook as well.

Gamers who have already played this title in its floppy-based version may want to skip the CD, but given the choice between the two, there's no contest: go for the compact disc. With great gameplay, a well-defined story, speech, a cluebook, and the convenience of CD-ROM, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis lets you live like the Man With the Hat.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

LucasArts, P.O. Box 10307, San Rafael, CA 94912, (800) 782-7927; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, General MIDI, Roland, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; CD-ROM drive and MSCDEX 2.1 or later required; mouse recommended; $69.95

ISLAND OF DR. BRAIN

If you signed on as a lab assistant in the Castle of Dr. Brain, the first saga in Sierra's Discovery Series, you've already experienced some of the old fellow's wacky what's-its. On the **Island of Dr. Brain,** you get to savor the good doctor's latest collection of puzzles, sight gags, sick puns, and ageless musings.

In this colorful goose chase for strategists aged 12 and up, Dr. Brain sends you to his personal Shangri-La, a floating PC-game preserve located somewhere in the Cerebral Hemisphere. Your goal is to search for a special battery – without it, Dr. Brain's latest invention is a dud.

You'll find everything from logic puzzles and chemical analyses to foreign-language word searches and programming robots – all played to the

rhythm of an original stereo soundtrack. In short, Dr. Brain's island is a fascinating getaway for the Renaissance kid.

Although some puzzles test your ability to use and manipulate language, most of the challenges in Island of Dr. Brain incorporate scientific or mathematical principles directly or indirectly. By the time you finish your first game, you'll have a better concept of counterweights, chemical density, spatial relationships, and even musical pitch.

You can play the game on three levels: novice, standard, and expert. But unlike games that pigeonhole you for the duration, Island of Dr. Brain lets you set the challenge level higher or lower for each individual activity. Nerdy he may be, but Dr. Brain's still a fair-minded guy. The tougher the challenge, the greater the number of points he adds to your score.

The price of Island of Dr. Brain is money well spent. It exposes kids (and adults) to a host of challenges in math, science, language, and the arts. You set your own achievement level, you learn new things, and best of all, you laugh a lot.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Oakhurst, CA 93644, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, IBM PS/1 Audio, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland MT-32/MT-100/LAP C-1/CM326/CM-64, SoundBlaster, Sound Source, and ThunderBoard; mouse recommended; $49.95

JAKE & JENNIFER EAGLE IN EAGLE EYE MYSTERIES

Jake & Jennifer Eagle in Eagle Eye Mysteries is an edutainment game from Electronic Arts that features more than 50 fictional heists, forgeries, disappearances, petty deceits, and even UFO sightings. Each mystery takes place in Richview, a small town where, as in most small towns, everybody knows everybody else.

The mystery may involve a jade Buddha statue, a Honus Wagner baseball card, or a high-frequency dog whistle. Each case is a lot easier to crack when librarian Mrs. Garcia or author Jay Lightfoot steers you to the right reference books.

Eagle Eye Mysteries features entertaining touches. Besides sporting lively music, great color, and attractive illustrations, many scenes include subtle background animations, such as rats darting across the floor of Mark Moriarty's fort. Like Sherlock Holmes' nemesis, Moriarty will spell trouble for you.

You begin a game by selecting one of the mysteries listed in the program's case books. Alliterative cases – the Basketball Blooper, the Runaway Reptile, the Vanishing Violin – offer players a progressively difficult range of puzzles.

You're off and running when a phone call, news report, police bulletin, or red alert from gal pal Nancy Marx comes into the treehouse headquarters of the Eagle Eye Detective Agency. Jake or Jennifer accompanies you to the scene of the crime, where you interview witnesses and suspects. A map of the town helps you select locations to visit. You and your partner use a notebook computer that automatically stores interviews and takes mug shots of possible perpetrators. To tap witnesses or look for clues, all you have to do is click on a scene. After you've searched all locations, analyze your clues and finger the suspect.

At the close of each case, your partner reviews the facts, complete with pop-up portraits of the story's characters. Very often Jake's and Jennifer's explanations reveal the motivation that led to the crime.

A scrapbook containing newspaper clippings, thank-you notes, and atta-boy (or atta-girl) citations grows as you crack one Eagle Eye mystery after another. The entries are even personalized with the child's name.

Whether at home or school, Jake and Jennifer Eagle can help kids discern main ideas, read for detail, and draw logical conclusions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (800) 245-4525, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible; DOS 3.3 or later (DOS 5.0 recommended); VGA; supports AdLib, AdLib Gold, ProAudio Spectrum, ProAudio Spectrum Plus/16, Roland, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; hard-disk drive with at least 10MB free space required; mouse recommended; $49.95

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL II

Electronic Arts' **John Madden Football II** is a sequel to its successful ancestor, John Madden Football, that offers coaching strategy, a strong foundation in football fundamentals, solid statistics, optional but involving arcade action, and great graphics.

Here you can call and design the plays, substitute and set the lineup, and control the arcade action. From a strategic coaching standpoint, Madden's untouchable. The program includes 81 plays, many from Madden's own Raiders playbook, and is infused with the Big Guy's distinctive coaching style and managing philosophy. As Madden himself writes in the manual, the idea is to carefully compare your team's strengths in order to take advantage of your opponent's weaknesses. John Madden Football II lets you compare ratings, head to head, between any two opposing players. Although you can review the numbers, the program simplifies the process by indicating a positive (+) number when you have the advantage, and a negative (-) when you're at a disadvantage.

Naturally, you can design your own plays. The play design is flexible and

lets you designate individual paths where players run and block. Once you're finished, you can do a slow-mo walk through to see what each player does, then practice the plays against your choice of defenses. Madden himself makes an appearance, both in the manual and online, where he's more than willing to suggest plays.

In the arcade mode, Madden gives you the option of controlling offensive players, but when your team's on defense, the computer takes over – no thrill of a solid sack or leaping interception here.

Unfortunately, the teams in Madden are make believe. There are, though, teams based on composites of Madden's own Raiders, an all-time All Star team, the '80s Forty-Niners, and the '70s Steelers.

The biggest problem with Madden II is its disappointing graphics. Arcade action is merely good, for the game's cartoon-style images – exaggerated players and that oversized football, for starters – make it hard to follow the action.

But although John Madden Football II can't match other pigskin products in the graphics department, it remains a solid strategic and statistical football program.

NOT RATED

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib and Roland; $49.95

JUMP JET

MicroProse's **Jump Jet** is a top-notch flight simulator that straps you in the pilot's seat of the remarkable Harrier fighter. What's so remarkable? How about rotating jet nozzles that let you take off and land vertically, stop in midair, hover, or even fly backwards?

Though MicroProse offers its usual first-class piece of programming in Jump Jet, it's skimped on the manual. If you want to fly this plane, be prepared to spend a lot of playing and flight time trying to figure out things that real rookie pilots would be told in basic training. There's lots to learn in Jump Jet, even for veteran virtual jet jockeys.

You have to get intimate with the information on the plane's V/STOL (Vertical/Short Take-Off and Land) HUD just to get your craft up off the ground and back down again. Among the fine points you'll need to watch are your angle of attack, engine thrust, jet nozzle temperature, side slip, flight path, vertical velocity, and nozzle and flap angles. It's easy enough to get your jet off the ground, but overlook one of your indicators on the way back down, and you're gone (And there are two more HUDs to learn). Fortunately, you can adjust any of several options to ease yourself into the complexity a bit at a time.

Jump Jet – the real thing – is hard to fly. Thanks to poor documenation, so's this virtual version.

Landing, free-fall bombing, strafing, and taking recon photos of ground targets are also tough, and you aren't given a chance to single out any of these for practice.

The world looks nice from a Jump Jet. Your control panel is rendered in crisp detail, and the scenery out the window is a nicely shaded, 3-D landscape of polygon-filled mountains, valleys, rivers, and seas.

But the view from the documentation is a lot less impressive. You will spend a lot of time performing what flyboys call WAGs as you stumble across techniques to handle the combat situations you'll encounter in Jump Jet. WAG? What's that? Why, a Wild-Ass Guess, of course.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 286 or faster); 1MB RAM; VGA/MCGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; joystick and mouse recommended; $69.95

KINGS QUEST VI

Sierra's newest quest raises the challenges, because **Kings Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow** is a fast-paced game featuring a rich vocabulary, intricate and intriguing puzzles, and a robust plot. This most recent incarnation of Roberta Williams' fantasy land delivers more than ever, and King's Quest VI's cinemalike graphics, illustrations, and sounds are noticeably enhanced from prior versions.

The plot revolves around Prince Alexander's quest for his true love, Cassima. Shipwrecked, then spewed upon the treacherous shores of distant lands, Prince Alexander, son of King Graham, faces danger while searching for his beloved in the Land of the Green Isles. The vile vizier of the land holds Alexander's beloved captive in the Castle of the Crown and assures others that she mourns only the recent death of her parents.

The archipelago islands of Wonder, Sacred Mountain, Beast, Mists, and Crown require constant travel using a magical map. Mistakes result in a ticket to death with a visit to denizens of the deep.

The puzzles in King's Quest VI are intricate and more than adequate to keep out all but the most ardent

pirates of intellectual property. Climbing the Cliffs of Logic requires complete documentation and an imagination worthy of a cryptologist. Also, new magic and spells mark this continuing saga.

This adventure love story is laced with objects and images from previous Quests, keeping a sense of familiarity while wandering into uncharted adventure. This is better than King's Quest V, and longer too, with a unique approach that should please both novice and experienced adventurers. A single, relatively straightforward thread exists to get you from start to finish, but lots of side-tracking subplots and subthreads exist if you want to draw out the game play.

King's Quest VI may be subtitled Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow, but it's guaranteed to thrill even the most intrepid PC game player.

NOT RATED

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93644, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, Roland MT-32, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, Sound Source, and Thunderboard; mouse required; $79.95

LANDS OF LORE

Lands of Lore, Westwood's first-person point-of-view adventure, shows us what Eye of the Beholder III *might* have been.

The engine for Westwood's original Eye of the Beholder was hardly original – the whole series felt like it was lifted right from FTL's Dungeonmaster. In that respect, Lands of Lore is an evolutionary game, although its numerous refinements make gaming *much* easier.

As usual, Westwood's graphics are first-rate. The interiors of the castle, the forest scenes, the little details like spell effects, and the interspersed plot-advancing cinematic sequences are all done in glorious 256-color VGA. While not truly a 3-D game, Lands of Lore supports fairly smooth scrolling. A more substantial addition is Lore's automap, which makes traveling a breeze.

Lore's interface is similar to Eye of the Beholder's – a point-and-click affair that lets you pick up or drop an item simply by dragging and dropping it to your inventory or the floor. You access the secret doors and activate hidden buttons within the walls in the same fashion. As in Eye of the Beholder, combat takes place in real time, making for a sometimes confusing melee handling the spells. There's little tactical complexity to Lore's battles, for it doesn't go beyond the hit-'em-hard school.

For all Lands of Lore's incremental improvements, its puzzles rely on an arbitrary pressure plate-on/off switch scheme. Puzzles exist not in the context of the story but seemingly to pose random obstacles to your progress. Your characters all have certain skills for combat, magic, and thievery – and each character's proficiency is determined depending on which skill is exercised most. Also, character interaction is superficial.

Lands of Lore looks a lot like Eye of the Beholder. It should, since both were designed by Westwood.

Bottom line: Lands of Lore skimps in places where story-intensive games like Betrayal at Krondor excel. Westwood may demonstrate its top-notch technical expertise in this title, but it also spotlights what's missing from too many fantasy role-playing games: a couple of good writers.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Virgin Games, 18061 Fitch Ave., Irvine, CA 92714, (714) 833-8710; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster); DOS 5.0; 2MB RAM; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, AdLib Gold, Roland MT-32/LAPC-1, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; $62.99

LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS 2

Infocom's two Leather Goddesses of Phobos adventures are like *distant,* distant cousins. The name's the same, but otherwise they're strangers. Leather Goddesses of Phobos? Meet **Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2: Gas Pump Girls Meet the Pulsating Inconvenience from Planet X!**

The original is the primal tale of lust, weakness, and bad '50s science fiction, brought to the screen during Infocom's heyday, a time when graphics were heresy. This newest version, from a revived Infocom, is a point-and-click graphic adventure with an hour of speech, music, VGA, and animation.

Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2 (LGOP 2 from here) is set in Atom City, Nevada, a town bounded by the Mesquito Indian reservation, an army base, and a rock slide. Ordinarily the rock slide is a tunnel, but a spacecraft set off the slide when it crash-landed. Its occupant, an alien beachball with eyestalks, roams loose. The Goddesses are leather-undied space Amazons with expansive ambition – not to mention bustlines – who want to enlist Earth's population as love slaves.

The creamy, full-screen VGA graphics could have come off the cover of some 1950s magazine. They're typi-

cally static, but a given scene often can be seen from more than one direction. And the you-click-on-it-you-carry-it interface is butter slick: it's got directional arrows for movement, a toolbox for retrieving the odd stuff you'll collect, and a little mouth for chatting.

One of the nicest things about LGOP 2 is that you can play it from the perspective of any of three different principal characters: garage operator Zeke Zarmen; his sweetheart Lydia, or the Alien.

But for all its enjoyable graphics, sound, and perks, the game itself is rather small for a 15MB whopper. This is little better than an afternoon's entertainment.

LGOP 2 seems to have been swallowed up by the amenities. The puzzles of old are gone. LGOP 2 is far too easy for any but beginning gamers – who are probably too young to be looking at semi-naughty bits anyhow.

Like many sequels, LGOP 2 lacks a clear reason for its existence, beyond the popularity of the original.

NOT RATED

Infocom, P.O. Box 67001, Los Angeles, CA 90067, (310) 207-4500; IBM PC or compatible (10MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM (560K free for VGA, 590K free for EGA); DOS 3.3 or later (DOS 5.0 recommended); EGA/VGA/MCGA/Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Pro-Audio Spectrum, PS-1, Roland MT-32/LAPC1, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, SoundMaster, Sound Source, Speech Thing, and Thunderboard; hard disk-drive with at least 15MB free required; mouse recommended; $69.95

THE LEGACY

The Legacy, a MicroProse foray into adventuring, takes you to the Winthrop mansion, a haunted house you've inherited from a horde of unpleasant, deceased relatives. That they're not deceased enough is apparent once you enter the door. Getting out becomes the order of the day – but you'll have to destroy the family curse. Not exactly an original story. Even more unfortunate, though, is the distinct feeling that this game is frightening *only* because it's half-baked.

Legacy sports handsome VGA corridors and rooms, a first-person perspective, and animated characters that appear in the distance. But Legacy's plot is thin. You grab objects, use weapons or spells on an approaching monster, move from room to room, and look for clues, though here the virtual world is even less rigorously constructed. An object can be seen on the floor when viewed from, say, the north, but if you turn east, the same object is gone. There's no animation when you use a weapon. You just see a little red shading on your enemy during "hits."

The game's mouse-driven interface is unintuitive, to put it mildly: don't even think about trying to use the frustrating keyboard commands. Most of the rooms are alike, populated by bookcases, wooden tables, grandfather clocks, and handsome paneling. Rooms that are different usually aren't really rooms, because you can't move through them. They're just pictures seen from the corridor, sometimes containing embedded objects you can grab.

Legacy makes no attempt to match its detailed visuals with their written descriptions, claiming, for instance, that all the stuffed chairs are "covered in dust" and all the sofas are "stained with blood." That's not what you see though.

With little plot, a shoddy interface, and repetitive visuals, Legacy relies on super-monsters and your own weakness to provide tension. When you don't die of wounds, you'll die of boredom. There are no puzzles here, just endless confrontations – take a pass on The Legacy.

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster); 2MB RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, Covox, Roland, and SoundBlaster; $59.95

THE LEGEND OF KYRANDIA

Welcome to the fairy tale kingdom of Kyrandia where times are not good and evil stalks the land. The villain is the former court jester, Malcolm, who many years ago killed the royal couple, then captured the fabulously magical Kyragem that was housed in the castle.

Since then, Malcolm has learned how to harness the Kyragem's powers for his own sadistic goals, while all other magic in the realm has begun to wither. The only hope lies in young Prince Brandon, whom you must help to solve the quests that will arm him against Malcolm.

The Legend of Kyrandia's visuals are all you'd expect from its developer, Westwood Associates. Background scenery throughout Kyrandia is extraordinarily good, though some of the finest screens – The Thriving Tree, the Cavern of Twilight – are pure window dressing. Kyrandia's human characters, however, are drawn in MCGA, and what's gained in speed is lost in definition. Prince Brandon's face is typical, nothing more than a smear of lines and color.

As it is, there are very few faces or forms to draw. Less than a dozen animated figures cover the entire Kyrandia landscape. This makes Kyrandia an unusually quiet game, with almost no speech, and most of the Prince's time is spent alone, finding objects and figuring out how they fit or work together.

There are two substantial stumbling blocks that keep you from enjoying Kyrandia – and neither is named Malcolm. The quests are very straightforward and don't overlap, much less run simultaneously. The resulting lack of places to go and options to pursue makes Kyrandia feel much more limited than comparable

Sierra or LucasArts products. But the puzzles pose a greater problem. Their solutions are found through trial and error rather than by observation and ingenuity.

No amount of breathtaking imagery or music in a graphical adventure can offset an absence of tangled plots, involving characters, clever puzzles, and effective dialogue. Kyrandia's not such a fun place, after all.

NOT RATED

Virgin Games, 18061 Fitch Ave., Irvine CA 92714, (714) 833-8710; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 3.3 or later; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland MT-32/LAPC-1, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; hard-disk drive required; $89.99

LEGENDS OF VALOR

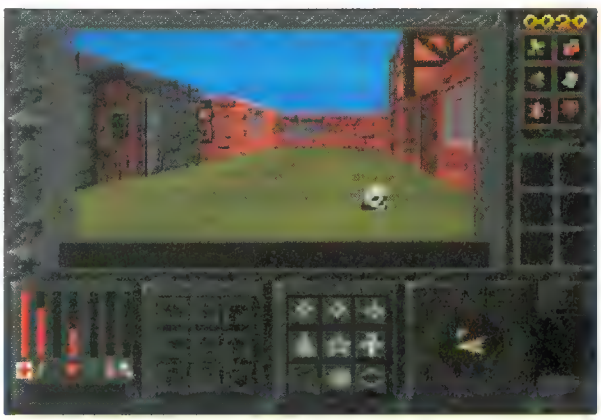
First impressions matter. SSI's **Legends of Valor** is awfully nice looking stuff. Your first few sojourns into its world are bound to be occasions of joyful discovery. Regrettably, this first impression is short-lived. Legends of Valor eventually proves to be less than the sum of its sumptuous parts. It doesn't play half as well as it looks, and it often manages to muck up even those things that it does right.

Legends of Valor sports the free-scrolling movement and bit-mapped walls of Origin's celebrated Ultima Underworld, but there the similarities end. One big difference is that much of Legends takes place on the surface – in the expansive town of Mitteldorf, with iridescent blue sky above and hordes of nonplayer characters going about their business.

Above all, Ultima Underworld is consistent: the game is every bit as good as the engine that drives it. It's a real place. Legends of Valor, on the other hand, is a game system crowded with interesting, if undeveloped, ideas, without the necessary character and depth to pretend it's something else.

Still, Legends has its strengths. The graphics images are pretty, though not quite all of a piece. Combat has been kept to a modest level. The movement is smooth, speedy, and intuitive. But movement is always on the level. You won't find anything like Ultima Underworld's plethora of ramps, platforms, and levels within levels. It leaves you kind of flat.

Certainly, there's a lot of people wandering around – humans, dwarfs, and werewolves – but in conversation, all typically prove little more than mannequins. There's no flow, no development, and no real content.



SSI's Legends of Valor doesn't play half as well as it looks.

Nor does Legends of Valor ever really generate suspense. The dungeons are rather dull places. Also, there's very little use of sound. The character-creation scheme, however, does let you create a very lifelike face, and it's a kick later when your face turns up on a wanted poster.

Legends of Valor is a beginning. Although it's not an utterly unpromising beginning, there's a lot more to do here before it can walk the dark spaces under the earth with Ultima Underworld.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, (800) 245-4525, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 3.1 or later (DOS 5.0 recommended); VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; mouse required; hard disk-drive with at least 8.3MB free required; $59.95

LEMMINGS 2: THE TRIBES

Lemmings 2: The Tribes, Psygnosis' new twist on the phenomenally successful Lemmings, may just overshadow its award-winning ancestor. Based on the further adventures of those curious Lemmings, this title takes the addictive fun of the original and multiplies it times twelve.

In this sequel, the mop-topped characters find their beloved Lemming Island threatened by an evil darkness. As the story goes, each of the twelve Tribes inherited a piece of a Golden Talisman which, when rejoined, let the Lemmings leave their isle prison. Each Tribe has taken up residence on a different part of the island, which they've adapted to their way of life. There's a Circus Tribe, a Medieval Tribe, a Space Tribe, a Beach Tribe and more. The new characters, some 60 in all which include surfers, parachuters, ninjas, skiers, and others, exhibit specific behaviors.

Select a tribe and you're ready to play. You must lead your Tribe through the maze to the safe exit hidden on each level. Take advantage of the Stomper Lemming to break through tunnel floors, or use the Flame Thrower Lemming to blast through walls and obstacles. Move to the next level without losing a single Lemming, and you'll earn a golden piece of the Talisman.

Each Tribe must survive ten levels in their part of Lemming Island to be saved. Only when you earn the gold Talisman for each level of each Tribe can the tiny beings leave the island. Naturally, that takes a long time, so use the game's save and load feature frequently to maximize your chances of winning.

Hot new technology? Probably not. Great game for anyone old enough to figure out the plot? Definitely. Lemmings 2: The Tribes is a game you can play for hours, days, weeks.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Psygnosis, Ltd., 675 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139, (617) 497-7794; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 2MB RAM; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, AdLib Gold, Roland, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; $59.99

LIBERTY OR DEATH

Liberty or Death is a simulation of our war of independence that may be short on tactical details, but it's long on strategic planning.

As a commander – General down to Captain – you're faced with an identical perplexing challenge. Too much to do, too little time. Should you drill the troops or draft new soldiers? Reform existing units or send them on a furlough? A better idea might be to bribe a local militia and convince them to join the regular army. The questions and options keep coming.

Commanders on both sides are rated by six characteristics. Leadership affects the way an officer's troops perform during battle. Tactics are sheer cunning. Discipline is the difference between success and failure. Loyalty determines the likelihood of desertion, and Reputation affects success in raising support. Body notes an officer's ability to perform tasks, which naturally declines with exertion, increases with rest.

You don't have to play every district commander. You can tell the computer to run some of the districts you control for as long as you'd like. But you can't escape the responsibilities of Commander-in-Chief.

Liberty or Death gives you a trio of officers on each side to choose from (including George Washington). Your C-in-C not only directs the overall military operation but also answers to the government.

Battles are fought on Koei's standard hexagonal field, where terrain is divided into 11 types (including forests, towns, and bridges) and units are separated into six styles.

A degree of realistic detail is sacrificed throughout Liberty or Death. Still, Koei's done its homework, for the general character of the war gets through. If you enjoy strategic simulations, get out your musket rifle and powder flask, then pick up Koei's latest. You won't be disappointed.

NOT RATED

Koei, 1350 Bayshore Highway, Burlingame, CA 94010, (415) 348-0200; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; DOS 2.0 or later; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive with at least 2MB free space required; $59.95

LINKS 386 PRO

Access' **Links 386 Pro** may not fix anything that wasn't broken, but its 32-bit technology and digitized screens of actual courses turn out some of the hottest graphics you've ever seen on a digital driving range. This is one great game.

Super VGA (SVGA) is a must for Pro, but you've got some leeway on PC speed – even on slower platforms, each screen refresh won't take more than four to five seconds. Its pictures are worth a thousand words each, and are augmented by great sound support. Everything from gallery applause to announcers' comments liven up the game.

One welcome addition is Links' unique record-game option. Once you record it, you can store a game on disk, or even send it to a friend via modem, so that he or she can play you stroke for stroke. You also can save single shots, so your hole-in-one can pump your ego perpetually.

Picking the proper club is easy in Links 386 Pro, which offers a selection menu that lists approximate distances for each club. The mathematically inclined can set their aim with a 360-degree rotation disk. Open or close your stance; move the ball forward to your left foot for drives or toward your right foot for short shots.

All shots are available – even shanks, duffs, slices, hooks, and whiffs. Links 386 Pro lets you customize your swing, then save setups for future shots. Traditional grid overlays for fairways and greens help you see the lay of the land.

Links keeps more detailed statistics than a CPA, such as longest drive, longest drive on a particular hole, average putts, percentage of greens in regulation, and so on. It shouldn't be hard to scare up a foursome in Links 386 Pro, which makes group golf easy with its multiplayer mode. (Links 386 Pro includes no computer player.)

Links 386 Pro's digitized look not only gives you great graphics images, it means that someone at Access has a pretty fantastic job, walking around taking pics of these great golf courses. You think he didn't take a bag of sticks along?

NOT RATED

Access Software, 4910 W. Amelia Earhart Dr., Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (800) 800-4880; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM (8MB RAM recommended); SVGA; hard-disk drive with at least 13MB free required; mouse required; $69.95

LOOM CD

Loom is a cinematic tapestry that engages you like few other games. Though it's on compact disc, with rich, movie-like sound, voices, and animations, it's the depth of its story that makes this adventure role-playing game such a delight.

You begin your journey on the Island of Loom, the place where the Guild of Weavers retreated long ago, after society grew suspicious of its inbred ways. Owing to a prohibition against marriage outside the Guild, the Weavers have slowly disintegrated.

Since the birth of Bobbin Threadbare, chaos has grown within the fabric. It's this chaos that you, as Bobbin, must ultimately face.

When you first visit the hall of the elders, the keepers of the loom, you acquire your distaff, the tool that helps you sense when you're near a magical presence, and with which you'll weave the drafts you need to live out your destiny.

Long ago, the Guild transcended from weaving tapestries to blending tones into drafts – a sequence of four notes that has an effect. The first one you learn is the relatively simple draft of opening, but there are also drafts to make yourself invisible, inspire great fear, or weave gold from straw.

On the Island of Loom, as everywhere in this mystical realm, clues abound. Weaving drafts is simple. It's finding them and learning to use them that are hard.

Because this version of Loom comes on compact disc, the music, the voices of the actors, and the animation will draw you into the story as never before. The characters' voices, for instance, are ideal – just the right blend of young and old, with exactly the variety of accents you'd imagine.

Loom draws you into its very fabric. As you tangle with its early explorations, you'll soon find yourself interwoven within the tapestry of this rich fantasy.

NOT RATED

LucasArts, P.O. Box 2009, San Rafael, CA 94912, (800) 782-7927; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 3.1 or later; VGA; CD-ROM drive required; mouse recommended; $99.95

LORD OF THE RINGS VOLUME 2: THE TWO TOWERS

Interplay meticulously studied Tolkien's work and captured its spirit in **Lord of the Rings Volume 2: The Two Towers.** Fans of J.R.R. Tolkien's seminal fantasy trilogy will appreciate the care.

Several computer and video games have paid homage to Tolkien and tried to stick his trilogy inside a computer. They haven't always been successful. Interplay's first installment, The Fellowship of the Ring, however, captured the elegant simplicity and mysticism of Middle-Earth. The Two Towers follows in its sibling's footprints.

Two Towers begins as Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas set off in search of Merry and Pippin. They encounter Eomer, and Gandalf reborn as the White Wizard. From there the action switches to Frodo and Sam, his faithful sidekick. Interplay switches viewpoints when each segment of the Fellowship reaches a predetermined point. This cliff-hanger approach works well, and it keeps you locked into the disparate travels of the sundered Fellowship.

This sequel looks identical to the first installment, with a similar icon-driven interface, though the graphics are somewhat refined. The view is strictly top-down, with Middle-Earth spread out in excellent detail. An automap feature has been added, a welcome addition during your characters' extensive travels.

This game is true to the spirit of Middle-Earth. That's at least partially due to the included book, which uses much of Tolkien's own prose.

Veteran fantasy role-players may find Tolkien magic weak: in the books, Gandalf never did more than cast spells to ignite a tree, open a door, and crack a bridge – not very

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impressive for the second-most-powerful being in Middle-Earth. In Tolkien's world, magic is subtle and works quietly.

The highest compliment a review can pay to Two Towers is that it's all the things a good computer role-playing game should be: detailed, fun, easy to play, and faithful to the original creator's universe.

If you liked Lord of the Rings: Volume 1 or loved the books, play Two Towers. It'll be like coming home.

NOT RATED

Interplay, 17922 Fitch Ave., Irvine, CA 922714, (714) 553-6655; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, and SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $59.95

THE LOST FILES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Electronic Arts' **The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes** steps you into Doyle's world, and into the midst of a grisly murder. In this 15MB graphic adventure, you piece together a mysterious puzzle and uncover the wrongdoer behind it all. As you suspect, nothing is as it seems, and no, the killer isn't Moriarty.

The game begins in Holmes' flat on Baker Street, where the famous solver of crimes waits with his trusty sidekick, Dr. Watson. Inspector Lestrade, the chief of police, delivers a message to Holmes: A murder's occurred in a back alley outside a theater, and the *modus operandi* looks suspiciously like that of Jack the Ripper.

Here's where you take over as Holmes. You'll interview witnesses and associates, examine the corpse, and pore over other objects. As in many adventure games, if you can pick it up, you'll probably need it. You'll also need to travel around London once you uncover the facts. Just point and click on the area you want to visit, and the tiny horse and carriage appears, taking you and Watson to the new location.

The interface of Lost Files is completely point-and-click. There are a number of commands at the bottom of the screen, such as Open, Pick Up, and Talk. In conversations, you pick from a menu of possible answers and questions which keeps the conversation's tone suitably Sherlockian.

Lost Files' animation and graphics aren't quite up to some of the exquisite images found in competing adventures, but they're more than adequate for the task. Sound and music are neither intrusive nor overdone, and there's a good deal of digitized speech, complete with British accents.

Lost Files is a solid excursion into adventuring; no remarkable or dazzling breakthrough here, but an experience thick with story and enticing to anyone who enjoys a dip into detective work. It's not particularly difficult, making it a good pick for beginning adventurers. After that, everything else is elementary.

NOT RATED

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster); 640K RAM; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive required; mouse recommended; $69.95

MAELSTROM

In **Maelstrom,** you're the Overlord of Harmony, a planet composed primarily of Fitzholnium, one of the most explosive elements in the universe. With this resource, Harmony is on the must-have list of the evil Syndicate who wants your world in one piece. You, of course, are bent on keeping the Syndicate's hands off the place.

In a simulation reminiscent of SimCity, you must balance the needs of Harmony's population against the need to build up its defenses. Caught in a classic "guns or butter" dilemma, you'll need your wits to keep everyone happy and the bad guys off your back.

Merit Software's Maelstrom combines science fiction and strategy.

From the holo desk–like control center, you start mining missions and assign research and development projects. At the Government screen you can adjust wages and allocate money for projects, then turn to the Military screen to build armadas and defensive installations.

Forget the Syndicate, and you risk the well-being of the entire alliance. But forget your subject's needs, and you risk your *own* well-being. Pure research and development projects may provide the technology needed to increase mining efficiency or beef up defenses, but you have to balance their potential against their cost in both funds and time.

Eventually, you'll get your chance to zap a few Syndicate invaders. You'll take an active role once the lasers start firing. You can take charge and give orders to individual ships or groups of ships, or if you'd rather sit back and watch, you can let the PC handle the battles.

Harmony's explosive nature may also make the Syndicate avoid the direct approach and go for the subver-

sive. When the skies are free from danger, look for it among your closest staff. Syndicate spies are everywhere, but your Secret Intelligence Network can keep Harmony free of moles, as well as influence nearby planets to join your cause.

Maelstrom combines strategy and science fiction into one fun simulation. For a solid glimpse of the Evil Empire of tomorrow, take a peek at Maelstrom.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Merit Software, 13707 Gamma Rd., Dallas, TX 75244, (214) 385-2353; IBM PC or compatible; 1MB RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; $69.95

MICHAEL JORDAN IN FLIGHT

Electronic Arts' **Michael Jordan in Flight** is a technical tour de force. The program appropriately blends flight simulator graphics with arcade basketball action to offer the best basketball simulation so far. Its strengths are first-rate and fairly realistic court-level action, great graphics (at least in Super VGA), and intelligent teamwork.

All the players, Jordan included, are digitized imitations integrated into the game's three-dimensional playing court. Throughout In Flight, your perspective is from right behind your player. The look is amazing – everything adjusts to any angle, and the game maintains the correct perspective for objects and players.

Commands are simple. Pass or request a pass on offense, and shoot on offense, and steal on defense. You can also rebound, or choose a direction to run or dribble the ball.

Play is all three-on-three, an optimal combination that allows for both individual grandstanding and teamwork. In Flight offers four plays. Your capable teammates carry out the plays – getting into position, passing the ball, making screens, and taking shots when they can.

In Flight features a tournament mode in which the program plays other games in the background while you play yours. Like any comprehensive sports game, In Flight tracks statistics for the teams and individual players.

Other nice touches include player substitutions, and a replay function that's fun: When you make a great shot, Jordan appears on the screen to tell you so, and when you blow it, he looks to the heavens in exasperation. The program also has a camera that lets you view the past bucket from a variety of camera angles. If you're so inclined, you can edit and save these films for your hero library.

The game's graphics shine in Super VGA.In plain-vanilla VGA, though, the players are blocky.

Michael Jordan in Flight does PC basketball better than any game, and clearly marks the next generation of it PC hoops. As Jordan, you can make the moves, and make those exhilarating slams – something few of us under five-foot-ten will ever experience in real life.

NOT RATED

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster, 33MHz 486 or faster recommended); 2MB RAM, with 560K free in lower RAM, and 1MB EMS memory (4MB recommended); VGA video card with 512K RAM (Extended VGA card with 1MB recommended); DOS 3.3 or later; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum 16, Roland MT-32, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; mouse or joystick required (mouse recommended); hard-disk drive with 3.5MB of free space required; $59.95

The only way you'll take on Mike is in In Flight, a basketball game that uses technology right out of a flight simulator.

MICROLEAGUE ACTION SPORTS SOCCER

They call it football. *We* call it soccer. MicroLeague, known for statistics-based sports software, offers **Action Sports Soccer,** an arcade game in which you control the players and pursue a coveted cup championship.

The software succeeds as an average arcade game, but it virtually ignores the sport's strategic aspects. When you use your head in this game, it's for hitting the ball.

You control the Manchester United Football Club, a team that aspires to the European Super Cup, European Cup Winners Cup, or United Europe Football Association (UEFA) Cup. In matchups and tournament play, you mimic a real march for the top.

Action Sports Soccer plays virtually the same as its electronic soccer ancestors. You control the player with the ball when you're on offense and the player nearest the ball on defense. As in most other PC sports games, you can play Action Sports Soccer one on one or against the computer. Strategically, you can set the formation and substitute players along the way, and view stats such as goals scored, goals allowed, and number of games played. Although you can set skill levels for various players on your team, it hardly seems to make a difference.

Action Sports Soccer

lets you use different kinds of kicks, controlling them by varying the length of time you hold down the action keys. But it's hard to do during a heated game.

Action Sports Soccer's rife with problems. For instance, sometimes it's tough to tell which player you're controlling. Even harder is adjusting to your ever-changing defensive player. Real soccer may be fast, but on a 486 machine, Action Soccer gets ridiculous. The game purports to work with the keyboard, but you'll have to be a contortionist to use the commands. Stick with a joystick.

Soccer's 256-color graphics images are on par with today's sports games. It supports the AdLib sound board for its introductory music, but when you're in the midst of soccer action, it's back to the beeps of your internal speaker.

If, and only if, you want some casual arcade action, think about Action Sports Soccer.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MicroLeague Sports, 2201 Drummond Plaza, Newark, DE 19711, (302) 368-9990; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib; $39.95

MICROLEAGUE BASEBALL 4

The newest in MicroLeague's line of baseball simulations, **MicroLeague Baseball 4** takes the strategic approach and gives you even more control over teams, player ratings and coaching options. The game is more realistic, and an intuitive interface makes navigating its options anything but a hassle.

MicroLeague Baseball 4 includes streak ratings for both hitters and pitchers. Other interesting statistics note whether a batter is a junkball or fastball hitter, his abilities versus left- or right-handed pitchers, his skill in pulling or hitting to the opposite field, and how well he can sacrifice. Of course, pitchers are rated, too.

On the field, you decide how deep the outfield plays, whether they play it safe or aggressively. Your pitcher takes your cue to pitch around the batter, pitch normally, or go right at him; infielders align in anticipation of the bunt, guard the lines late in the game, or play behind the runner at first.

Ratings are everywhere, and MicroLeague Baseball 4 includes defensive, evaluations of players' fielding percentage, range, and even arm strength. All these stats come together on the screen.

The editor lets you draw up a virtually endless list of both offensive and defensive plays, and you can schedule and maintain any length schedule you want. The computer will automatically play a complete 162 game season in less than an hour.

MicroLeague Baseball 4 is nothing short of excellent in its statistical capabilities. You can print historical stats or compiled statistics from your season play, picking and choosing from the huge number of the game's statistical categories. You can even update these statistics during a real season by connecting to USA Today Statistics.

MicroLeague Baseball 4 is a must for any PC-owning baseball fan. Not only does it deliver on its promise as a strategic master, but unlike other stat-based sims, it's anything but boring. Just like real baseball.

NOT RATED

MicroLeague Sports, 2201 Drummond Plaza, Newark, DE 19711, (302) 368-9990; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, Big Mouth, DigiSpeech, Echo II, Media Master, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, SoundBlaster, Sound Source, and SpeechMaster, and Tandy sound; hard-disk drive with at least 3MB free space required; $49.95

Microleague Baseball 4 drops in small video windows to show the on-field action.

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 5.0

Microsoft Flight Simulator, the granddaddy of computer simulations, gets a much-needed face lift in its new version 5.0.

The most obvious enhancement is the addition of stunning 256-color SVGA graphic. Its VGA images are also vastly improved. Each aircrafts, interior graphics are now not only completely different, but are ren-

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Microsoft's new Flight Simulator 5.0 adds impressive graphics, both inside and outside the cockpit.

dered in photo-like clarity.

The view outside the cockpit is equally impressive. All exterior views of your aircraft, and any others flying near you, are utterly realistic. And when you look up from your instruments and down on the scenery, you'll find a very real world outside the windshield. Landing strips, fields, cities, and buildings all have a solid, textured look to them.

As in version 4.0, you're not alone. There are other planes in the sky, traffic on the roads, boats on the waterways, and even a fuel truck to fill 'er up after a long flight. If you want even more realism, you can communicate with air traffic controllers and deal with constantly changing weather by selecting the appropriate menu choices.

Another enhancement new to Flight Simulator 5.0 is some decent engine noise: the sound is realistic and changes appropriately as engine rpm climbs and falls. The simulation supports most popular sound cards, from the SoundBlaster to Microsoft's own Windows Sound System.

Though no new aircraft have been added to 5.0, you can still fly the Cessna, Learjet, sailplane, and the Sopwith Camel. With all the improvements in graphics, you'll be glad to know that overall performance and screen refresh rate remain acceptable.

You start the engine, take off, work the radio stack, set the navigation equipment, and fly from point A to point B, dealing with whatever you encounter along the way. No score is kept and there are no bandits on your tail. If you really want to take the time to learn something about the fascinating and complex world of general aviation, Flight Simulator 5.0 is so good that no one even bothers to compete.

NOT RATED

Microsoft, One Microsoft Way, Redmond, WA 98052-6399, (800) 227-4679; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster); 530K RAM free, 1MB extended or expanded memory; EGA/VGA/SVGA; DOS 3.2 or later; supports AdLib, ATI Stereo/FX, Microsoft Windows Sound System, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, and Thunderboard; $64.95

MIG-29: DEADLY ADVERSARY OF FALCON 3.0

If you're a fan of Falcon, **MiG-29: Deadly Adversary of Falcon 3.0** is your chance to fly the plane you fight against. This latest member of Spectrum Holobyte's Electronic Battlefield Series fills a gap in the popular Falcon system. With MiG, you can really test your combat skills, for it's your chance to finally see if the pilot or the plane makes the difference.

MiG-29 lets you fly your Falcon on a successful mission, then turn around and turn the tables by flying the same mission from the MiG's point of view. Avoiding the Falcon's sophisticated electronic warning and ordinance systems won't be easy, but you'll have two advantages: You'll know the Falcon's capabilities, and you'll be flying a hot airplane.

In a way, you're set free in this Mikoyan-Gurevich fighter jet. With no fly-by-wire system to hold you back, you can fly low enough to trim trees if you like. And a unique helmet-mounted aiming monocle frees your hands so you can cut notches for all the Falcons you kill.

Air-to-air ordinance on the MiG includes Archer, Aphid, and Alamo missiles; rocket pods; and a 30mm automatic cannon. Air-to-ground armament ranges from cluster bombs to Kerry missiles. All are activated by the immediate response of the helmet-mounted aiming system.

Flying a MiG is a different story – it's a little like riding a skittish horse. Agility is the name of the game in

MiG-29 adds the opposition to the state-of-the-art flight sim, Falcon 3.0.

modern dogfights, and the MiG is very agile.

Multi-player competition is possible with MiG-29 through direct connection of two computers or over a modem. And since both the Falcon foundation and this add-on support Novell networks, as many as six of you can duel in the air.

With this enhancement, you've got both sides of the best dogfighting this side of the Middle East. For Falcon fans, this is a must-get game.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Spectrum Holobyte, 2490 Mariner Square Loop, Alameda, CA 94501, (510) 522-1164; IBM PC or compatible; 1MB RAM (2MB RAM with EMS recommended); VGA (256-color); DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, Roland and SoundBlaster; requires Falcon 3.0; $59.95

MIGHT AND MAGIC: CLOUDS OF XEEN

Might and Magic III isn't followed by IV, as you'd expect, but by **Clouds of Xeen.** This new adventure doesn't depend on foiling the plans of Sheltem, as do the first three Might & Magic role-playing games, but instead starts you on a whole new quest on the world of Xeen. While Might & Magic III: Isles of Terra was head and shoulders above the competition, Xeen is another well-made role-playing game that breaks little new ground.

Might & Magic III vets will find the Xeen system a comfortable place, since it's nearly identical to its precursor. Xeen has automapping, a notepad to keep track of your latest endeavors, and a magic system based on spell points and gems. Xeen presents you with the first-person viewpoint richly rendered in full 256-color VGA, and it sports digitized sound effects and numerous snippets of digitized speech.

Just as in Might & Magic III, Xeen offers up an entire world to explore, complete with forests, towns, and oceans. You can select your party from a mix of races and portraits.

You begin in the town of Vertigo, where you buy arms, armor, and spells. Then, once out of town, some nearby caverns – in this case, mines – await. Like Might & Magic III, Xeen is nonlinear in a sense, but rest assured that all roads lead to Lord Xeen and your inevitable showdown.The villain is an undead of some sort, and has enthralled the king and banished his wizard, who has contacted your party to thwart Xeen's plans.

A graphic richness is in evidence throughout the game, starting with the icon-driven interface, which remains an example of thoughtful, intelligent, and flexible game design. Xeen eschews the trend towards real-time combat, for though the animation suggests that action takes place as you watch, it's really turn-based. The villain is an undead of some sort, and has enthralled the king and banished his wizard, who has contacted your party to thwart Xeen's plans.

While not breathtaking, spectacular, or ground-breaking, Xeen provides generous amounts of entertainment to gamers looking for some old-fashioned fantasy role-playing built around a solid game engine.

NOT RATED

New World Computing, P.O. Box 4302, Hollywood, CA 90078, (818) 999-0606; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 2MB RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, Pro Audio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, Sound Source, and Sound Master II; hard-disk drive required; mouse recommended; $69.95

MIGHT & MAGIC V: DARKSIDE OF XEEN

In a game, anything's possible. Even a world's that flat. That's what you'll find in **Might & Magic V: DarkSide of Xeen.** This literally flat planet has two sides, and both are undergoing unprecedented crises.

Ineffectual King Burlock has fallen under the malign influence of a mysterious newcomer who claims to be his long-lost brother, Roland. The kingdom is splitting apart, and Crodo, the King's advisor, has vanished. But matters are much worse on the other side of the planet, the mysterious, so-called DarkSide of Xeen. Shadowy Prince Alamar has stolen the royal throne, turned Queen Kalindra into a vampire, and besieged the noble Dragon Phoenix.

Third in the Might & Magic lineup of role-playing games, Clouds of Xeen puts monsters in your face.

This, then, is the setting for Might & Magic V, a game that deserves as many thumbs-up as you can hoist.

As in previous episodes of this series, you start with a beginner's party of six adventurer wannabes who advance to the difficult main quest through exploration and tangential secondary quests. Your team receives experience, spells, valuable booty, and gold by finding lost objects and destroying evil creatures.

Combine Darkside of Xeen with its forerunner – Clouds of Xeen – and you have a huge universe to explore.

DarkSide is as visually appealing as the last two releases of Might & Magic – not surprising, since all three use the same game and graphics engine. Its 256-color, high-res VGA artwork produces impressive results. You won't be disappointed by DarkSide's music, either.

Combat remains this game's weakest element. Your party of six stands in a single square, fighting several opponents directly to the front. Although there are a wealth of interesting spells and equally diverse weaponry, the lack of a battle map with individual character movement and tactics are clearly missed.

On the other hand, the criticism against Clouds of Xeen – that it was too easy – can't be laid at the doorstep of DarkSide. As the second half of a two-part adventure, DarkSide is definitely more complex, more ingenious, and more dangerous than its predecessor.

When Clouds and DarkSide are installed consecutively, they mutate into The World of Xeen. This combination offers all major and minor Clouds and DarkSide quests simultaneously, as well as a third major quest which requires access to both "sides" of Xeen.

Mark DarkSide as the best flat-world game around.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

New World Computing, P.O. Box 4302, Hollywood, CA 90078; (818) 999-0606; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM; VGA; DOS 3.3 or later; supports all major sound boards; hard-disk drive with at least 15MB free space required; mouse recommended; $69.95

MULTIMEDIA POOL

Multimedia Pool is a terrific Windows-based simulation of eight ball, nine ball, straight pool, and bumper pool.

Multimedia Pool takes a purist's point of view, for it uses an overhead, two-dimensional display of the table. With mouse or keyboard, you rotate a cue stick around the cue ball to set up your shot. An optional aiming guide extends a straight line from the cue across the table, helping you determine where your shot will go. In a separate window, you move a scroll bar to dictate the power of your shot and the English on the cue ball. Click the Shoot button, and the computer executes the shot.

Since the computer accurately performs all shot setups, there's little chance that inept coordination will screw up the shot in Multimedia Pool. On the other hand, because the ball physics are well worked out – particularly as they apply to cue English – the strategy and shot selection aspects of the game are completely satisfying.

Multimedia Pool offers four modes of play: a self-running demo, a one-player practice mode, play against the computer, or play against a human opponent. Five artificial opponents with varying skills stand ready to challenge your pool-playing prowess. The best of them is *very* good, indeed. The same built-in intelligence is invaluable as a Suggest Shot option, which indicates how to play the best shot on the table. It's a great way to learn both mechanics and strategy.

Since Windows isn't an optimal environment for real-time animation, Multimedia Pool does seem sluggish, particularly during the break when several balls are moving simultaneously. On these occasions, the balls roll in slow motion, but they still accurately recreate the physics of rebounds and impacts.

The *Multimedia* in its title suggests that Pool might have video clips or other cutting-edge technology, but it doesn't. Still, for wannabe pool sharks, avid enthusiasts, or Windows-bound workers who need a break, Multimedia Pool rolls onto the scene as one of the best Windows pastimes around.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Lifestyle Software Group, 63 Orange St.,

When you want to take a break from Windows' Solitaire, rack up Multimedia Pool instead.

St. Augustine, FL 32084, (904) 825-4922; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM; VGA; Windows 3.1; mouse recommended; $39.95

MUTANOID MATH CHALLENGE

The Mutanoids get to strut their smarts in Legacy's first space-age program, **Mutanoid Math Challenge**, a computational-learning title for kids aged 7 to 14. As a classroom enrichment activity, Mutanoid Math Challenge is a sure-fire winner. But as a title for the home hard drive, Mutanoid doesn't deserve your dollars.

Children playing Mutanoid Math Challenge pick their opponents from a cast of 15 alien characters. Although the aliens seem a bit too smart-alecky sometimes, kids will probably love the Mutanoids' irreverent, cranky style.

The game itself is appealing, although Legacy's off-disk copy-protection scheme – like so many others – is gratuitous. The playing field on the game board consists of intersecting rows and columns of colored cubes, and Mutanoid Math Challenge presents a grid of equations-in-the-making. Some are oriented horizontally; others, vertically. The program fills in selected cubes with a number (from one to 99) and an operand or an equal sign. Players select each blank cube with the keyboard or click on the cube with the mouse before entering an appropriate number or operand as they try to complete each five- or seven-cube equation.

Mutanoid Math Challenge features three difficulty levels you can customize, five achievement ranks, a Hall of Fame, and a glop-or-be-glopped tournament ceremony. The program can track scores for as many as 40 players – a value-added option for classrooms. On the negative side, Mutanoid Math Challenge froze on two different occasions during testing, forcing a PC kick-start.

To its credit, Mutanoid Math Challenge offers an opportunity for open-ended math exploration – something that sets it apart from traditional drill-and-practice programs.

When you add it all up, the program's equations and word problems can really stretch your math muscles. Unfortunately, math aerobics may not play as well on the home PC – unless players are exceptionally motivated – because there Mutanoid Math Challenge must compete with more enticing adventures, puzzles, and arcade games.

NOT RATED

Legacy Software, 9338 Reseda Blvd., Northridge, CA 91324, (800) 532-7692; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; CGA/EGA/VGA; $49.95

NATIONAL LAMPOON'S CHESS MANIAC 5 MILLION AND 1

National Lampoon's Chess Maniac 5 Million and 1 is guaranteed to be rude, outrageous, raunchy, offensive, and degrading. It's also a good game of chess.

This is an over-the-edge electronic chess game, an offbeat offspring of the classic board game and National Lampoon–style sicko humor. Chess Maniac's board pits the Persians against the Medievals in a game where pawns are belly dancers and jesters, and bishops look like genies and wizards. Like other computer chess games – Battlechess is probably the best known – Chess Maniac's pieces move.

And when a piece is captured, it's captured up-close and personal. Four-second digitized, video sequences liven up the game whenever a piece is taken. Chess Maniac features over 64 different death playlets, which range from the gory to the ridiculous. Even when the blood flows, it's almost daffy.

This sound-intensive, full-motion video is the heart of Chess Maniac, and it takes a hefty 27MB of hard disk space. If you have a CD-ROM drive, consider the compact disc version, which puts only 1MB on your PC's hard drive.

Believe it or not, you do get to play chess in Chess Maniac. Amid all the foolishness is a quality chess engine

complete with ten ranked difficulty levels. And unlike some other PC chess games, here the lower levels really are lower levels. At the higher levels, Chess Maniac will kick butt as effectively as any other virtual chess master, but play low and even rookies have a chance of winning a game or two. You even make Maniac into a standard kind of game when you pick the Boring piece set.

Everything about this game is painted with the same quirky brush. A taunting, insulting sky-writer flies by every now and then to laugh at your strategy. At the beginning of each game, you select your opponent, describe your underwear, and enter your shoe size.

Chess Maniac provides a lot of laughs, a decent chess match in its own right, and enough broadly bawdy humor to wring a least a grin or two from anyone.

Spectrum Holobyte, 2490 Mariner Square Loop, Alameda, CA 94501, (510) 522-1164; IBM PC or compatible (25MHz 386 or faster); 2MB RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, and SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $59.95

NEW MATH BLASTER PLUS FOR WINDOWS

If you liked earlier incarnations of Math Blaster, the drill-and-practice math game, you're going to love **New Math Blaster Plus for Windows**, which retains the qualities that made its ancestor a best-seller.

New Math Blaster for Windows comes with a large collection of equations that range from simple arithmetic to difficult division. And you can tailor the program to suit your children's needs with the built-in equation editor.

The best game of the lot is the Number Recycler, which presents children with a list of equations to correct. Number Recycler requires that kids think ahead, consider their resources, and learn math. Two of the other modules simply ask kids to fill in missing answers to equations. In Trash Zapper, children earn ammunition for shooting down space fiends. In Rocket Launcher, kids earn parts for their space ships, and when the ships are completed, they blast off. In another module, kids help the little Blasternaut character fly to the correct answer to an equation.

If you have an audio card in your computer, you'll hear New Math Blaster Plus for Windows' more interesting sound repertoire. The graphics are also much improved in this new version.

These enhancements will please anyone who likes the mixture of arcade-style sequences and drill-and-practice exercises. In many cases, the arcade sequences don't work harmoniously with the exercises – the line between work and fun is too obvious. More disappointing is the awkward way New Math Blaster Plus utilizes (or underutilizes) the Windows interface. Even though it's a retread of an existing title, New Math Blaster for Windows should have put the interface's multiple-windows abilities to work improving the educational experience.

Assuming you want to use drill and practice exercises on your computer, New Math Blaster Plus for Windows is a good choice. And if you enjoyed Math Blasters of the past, you'll surely enjoy this updated version.

NOT RATED

Davidson & Associates, 19840 Pioneer Ave., Torrance, CA 90503, (800) 545-7677; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM; VGA; DOS 3.0 or later; Windows 3.0 or later; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, and ProAudio Spectrum; mouse required; $59.95

NFL VIDEO PRO FOOTBALL

With all those weeks of armchair quarterbacking under your belt, it's time to test your mettle in **NFL Video Pro Football.**

NFL Video Pro Football combines sharp and colorful computer-graphics images, digital sound, digitized motion video, and football savvy that will challenge even the most ardent fan. This game will keep your spirit mesmerized, your heart pumping, and your mind racing.

Teams and rosters are found on the Newspaper screen, where you also begin play. From there, you head to the Studio, where 14 video monitors are displayed on screen, each representing one of the contests scheduled for the day.

You can watch all the games simultaneously, or you can take a single game to its deepest level – right to the stadium of the game you want to coach. In the stadium, you command the action for the home team. On offense and defense you can choose from six formations, each offering 12 possible plays.

Once you've called the play, run it, then sit back and listen to the pop of the players' pads, the groaning of your fullback as he struggles through the line, and the background commentary provided by the play-by-play announcer.

If you tire of the current game, you can leave it in no-huddle mode and head back to the Studio to catch up on any of the other 13 battles being fought at the same time. You can jump into any other game that interests you, coach for a while, and leave that one in no-huddle.

If you're not happy with the way some of your people are playing, bench 'em. Go back to Newspaper level, point-and-click on the team you want to change, and find the player you want to replace; each man on every team has a substitute.

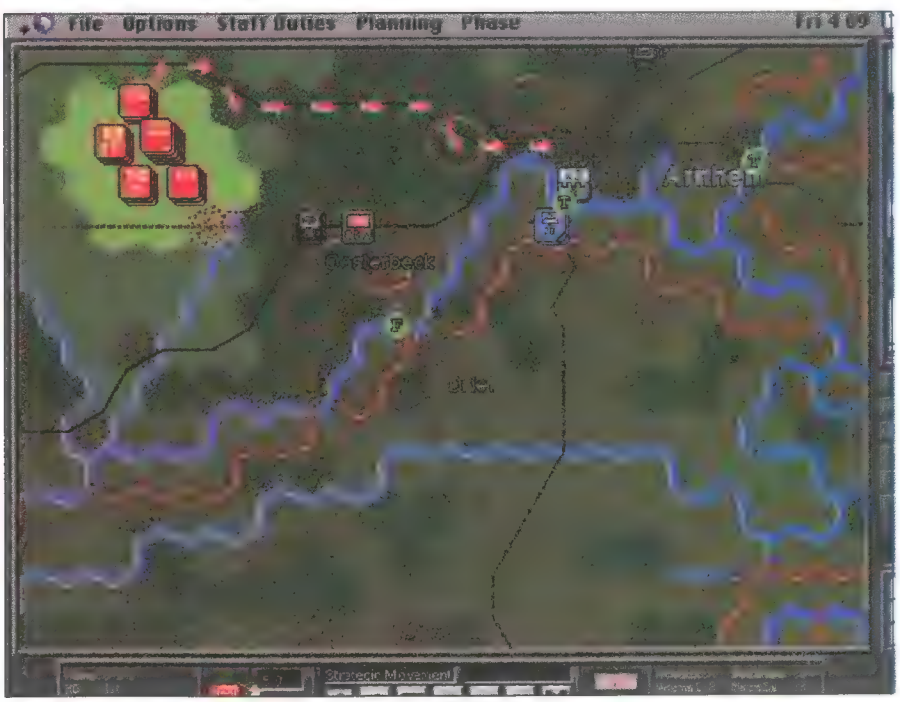
Konami has assembled an intriguing football game in NFL Video Pro Football, which offers digitized action taken from the NFL film archives. This game's 144 different plays are enough to satisfy almost any Monday-morning critic.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Konami, Inc., 900 Deerfield Parkway, Buffalo Grove, IL 60089-4510, (708) 215-5100; IBM PC or compatible; DOS 3.3 or later; VGA; supports SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive with at least 22MB free required; mouse required; $79.95

OPERATION MARKET GARDEN

Three-Sixty Software's **Operation Market Garden** is another V for Victory battleset that is sure to please the many fans of the company's war gaming system. But be forewarned: the challenge of the greatest airborne operation of World War II is so immense you may find that it becomes a part of your dreams.



V for Victory: Operation Market Garden is yet another Three-Sixty WWII war game.

As commander of the Allied forces, you'll have a mere three days to punch a hole in the German defenses, secure the road through central Holland, and link up with the airborne infantry, which is stuck deep in enemy territory. If you fail to establish this vital supply line, the paratroopers will perish. Speed is essential, but the element of surprise is on your side.

If you're not familiar with this series, suffice it to say that you're in charge of all troop movements and all ground attacks. You call for air strikes and deploy reinforcements as you labor under limited battlefield intelligence and in all kinds of weather. The familiar aspects of simulated warfare are all represented, but an unusually easy-to-use interface helps cut through the details, leaving you free to plan the grand strategy. You won't be responsible for man-to-man tactics; you just have to keep the whole operation going.

Operational Market Garden includes a large, colorful map of the mission area so you can get the big picture instead of scrolling around looking at bits and pieces on the screen. The game's two-player mode lets you whip a flesh-and-blood opponent, though you'll be hard pressed to find a real player as able as Market Garden's computerized general.

Unfortunately, part of the challenge is in just figuring out your battle plan, for Market Garden lacks an overview of the actual operation in its manual. That complaint is the only flaw in an otherwise first-rate simulation.

You'll need clear-headed planning and steely nerves to complete this difficult WWII operation. With luck, you'll own Holland by the third day. If you're a strategy simulation fan, Operation Market Garden is a must-have.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Three-Sixty Pacific Software, 2105 S. Bascom Ave., Suite 165, Campbell, CA 95008, (409) 776-2187; IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); 3MB RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; mouse required; $69.95

OUT OF THIS WORLD

Interplay's **Out of This World** is an awesome adventure game, where a whacked-out experiment with antimatter zaps Lester to a weird parallel universe. He wants to get back home, and if you can overcome some hardware-related speed problems, you can help.

Out of This World sports a unique look. A polygonal system of VGA graphics adds to the game's flashy, outrageous, rotoscoped, and real-time sideview animation. Cinema-slick close-up shots, pans, zooms, and scaling bring Chaykin's newly discovered world to life and help showcase some superbly animated action sequences.

The sounds are some of the best around, and the music really rocks. The characters even speak. However, you may find that trying to get the best sound out with your audio board eats up processor time and slows down the game.

The cinematic graphics spin a fascinating adventure. Your trek is lengthy, covering roughly 12 areas in the strange, new world. You're free to travel back and forth across the land, but much of your quest takes place in labyrinthine, underground caverns. The place is literally crawling

with tenacious, carnivorous creatures. But the real challenge comes when you encounter the brutish race of beings who populate this world.

Gameplay is outstanding. You run, jump, kick, and shoot, but overcoming some critical obstacles calls for split-second timing. Expect to max out on good-looking death scenes. You can use a joystick or the keyboard, but the default keyboard mode produces the fastest action. Out of This World forces you to be fast with your fingers, but Chaykin's survival really depends on your brains, not your brawn.

If you take on Out of This World, get ready to play something different. The animation is so lifelike that you'll genuinely fret about the fate of your otherworldly friend. The action's intense, sometimes frustrating, but always fun.

NOT RATED

Interplay, 17922 Fitch Ave., Irvine, CA 92714, (714) 555-6678; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, Roland LAPC-1, SoundBlaster, and Sound Source sound boards; $59.95

PACIFIC ISLANDS

Pacific Islands, a tank game, isn't the usual scenery-with-geometric-shapes. Empire's designers use a combination of detailed bitmapped objects and backgrounds and filled-polygon buildings, with results that are striking and more lifelike than anything you've seen in a tank game. The tanks look terrific coming by, and when they burn, boy, do they. In this game, there's more suggestion of physical depth and more of a world out there.

The original Team Yankee had only five scenarios. When complete, they were simply recycled and pitched at a higher difficulty level. Pacific Islands, the sequel, offers 25 scenarios and a measure of control of their order. It has a nice long life.

And Pacific Islands is a lot of fun. Dedicated simulation players may find fault with the consolidated controls and arcade elements, which depart from what they've come to expect from games like MicroProse's authoritative M1 Tank Platoon. And it's true that they're not strictly authentic. But for the gamer who doesn't think he has to *live* the tanker's life to play the game – managing 16 vehicles is either drudgery or a frenzy – it's the easiest system for the average G.I. Joe.

Each four-vehicle unit has one view, one gun, and one set of controls. There's no turret turning, no range-estimating, no gun-elevating. It's just point, then click, then watch the explosion. And when you have all four units on screen, they're all active at once; you have only to skate the mouse over to another window to do your business.

You'll want to fire a warning shot at the game's goofy premise as well. Would you believe renegade Soviet commies backed by North Koreans in the takeover of...Yama Yama?

Premise aside, Pacific Islands is *very* good, and it's likely to keep you busy for quite some time.

NOT RATED

Empire Software (distributed by ReadySoft, Inc.), 30 Wertheim Court, Unit 2, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada L4B 1B9, (416) 731-4175; IBM PC or compatible; 550K RAM; CGA/EGA/VGA; MS-DOS 2.0 or later; supports AdLib and Roland boards; mouse recommended; $49.95

PACIFIC WAR

Strategic Simulations took excellent advantage of the PC's bookkeeping skills when it created **Pacific War**, a game almost as big as the ocean it's named after.

You take command of all land, sea, and air units in the Pacific theater of World War II, then issue orders to battalions, divisions, and even individual ships. This game spans the Arctic and the Aussies, Los Angeles and Tokyo Bay – over 78 million square miles of ocean make up your board. Your duties include, but aren't limited to, anything Nimitz or Yamamoto faced. You create task forces and assign leaders, order amphibious landings and air strikes, and deploy your nation's strategic assets. Mundane tasks such as refueling, re-supplying, and refitting are also yours, as are jobs such as expanding bases and monitoring the industrial expansion of friendly factories.

Pacific War preserves SSI's well-deserved reputation for detail and historical accuracy. When creating task forces or taking damage, the game even supplies actual pictures of the ships.

You issue orders for troop movement via a pattern that cycles through all your land forces: You tell them to hold, move out, or find resupply. You can send your air units on search missions, to clear an area for your task forces, or flying deep into enemy territory for pre-invasion raids.

The manual contains more than 50 pages on military equipment and is yet another indication of Pacific War's attention to detail. Historically accurate time lines don't list any ship or aircraft type until it was actually available.

It takes major planning to coordinate all your forces and execute a battle plan. More than battle plans are tested in Pacific War, though, for part of your job as commander is contending with the minutiae of repairs, replacements, and reinforcements.

Is Pacific War too big? Not if you dream of commanding fleets, not just a frigate.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $79.95

PGA TOUR GOLF

PGA Tour Golf for Windows is a DOS game that's made the move to Windows. Thus it's no surprise that this simulation retains many of the characteristics, both good and bad, of its C> forerunner.

In Electronic Arts' game, you become part of the prestigious PGA Tour, playing round after round against the pros, trying to make the cut and ultimately win the tour. Though PGA Tour Golf features the names and likenesses of various PGA pros, including Craig Stadler, Paul Azinger, Fuzzy Zoeller, and Larry Mize, it limits their participation. The pros' names appear on the tournament's scoreboards, and selected pros offer advice on each hole, but that's it. You don't actually hit the fairway with Fuzzy, or play Stadler head-to-head, as this game's title might lead you to believe.

At its default settings, PGA Tour Golf for Windows offers several views of each hole, including a moving helicopter shot of the hole, an overhead view of the hole, and finally, the traditional game view, you look down the fairway from behind your golfer.

Like many golf simulations, PGA Tour Golf for Windows lets you aim your shot with a cross hair and operates with a conventional three-click power bar. One PGA Tour Golf feature of note is that its power bar automatically adjusts itself for club distances, something particularly useful for the beginner.

When you get on or near the green, the game slaps a grid atop the putting surface to show its contours and breaks. You can rotate the grid to view it at different angles.

The Windows version, like its DOS ancestor, tracks statistics, including the longest drive, driving accuracy, and most important, earnings.

If you have an audio card, PGA Tour Golf for Windows features music and sound effects. The graphics are attractive, but they can't match the semirealistic look of other programs. In all, PGA Tour Golf for Windows is only satisfying, not spectacular.

NOT RATED

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible (80386 recommended); 2MB RAM; VGA; Windows 3.0 or later; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro; $59.95

PIT FIGHTER

Based on the popular stand-up arcade game, **Pit Fighter** works your joystick skills as you try to defeat seven different opponents and earn the right to square off against the Ultimate Warrior. This is beat 'em up at its best. If you've played the arcade game, you'll notice this fine conversion features new locations and new fighters. Pit Fighter's designers kept the spirit of the game, which even offers a brutality bonus for mean and dirty fighting.

The challengers are champions from the legal sports of karate, kickboxing, and wrestling. Ty, Kato, and Buzz have chosen to compete in the illegal, fight-to-the-death arena of Pit Fighting, lured by the huge purses. Special punches from each pit fighter's discipline form a varied attack. Pick the wrestler and use his special body slam. Kato has powerful flip kicks and backhands, and kickboxer Ty devastates with his flying spin kick. From the Executioner to Heavy Metal, the bad guys came to fight. They've survived a season in the meanest, toughest school of hard knocks.

There are also objects in the ring to heave. From throwing stars to sticks, from crates to stools to kegs, everything in the ring is fair game as a weapon. Some kegs have a power pill inside which doubles your punching power – a super steroid.

Pit is an excellent conversion with all the spirit, graphics, and noise of its coin-op cousin, but it accommodates only two players.

Pit Fighter's a brutal sport that demands brawn, no brains. Take off your thinking cap, step into one of its strange venues – from the State University boiler room to the Presidential gardens – and get rid of your hostilities.

NOT RATED

Domark, 500 S. Winchester Blvd., San Jose, CA 95128, (800) 245-7744; IBM PC or compatible; CGA/EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; $34.95

POPULOUS II: TRIALS OF THE OLYMPIAN GODS

You're one of Zeus' brats in **Populous II: Trials of the Olympian Gods**, a sequel to Bullfrog's classic. This second try is just as much fun, even bigger, and a lot easier to grasp.

You may be a god, but you're stuck on Earth, while the important deities live up there with Dad on Mount Olympus. Oh, he'll let you in. But first you'll have to face and defeat 32 other gods on a host of worlds.

The game offers 1,000 increasingly difficult scenarios. Fortunately, you don't have to play every one. Zeus rates your performance after each victory – you and your former enemy's respective populations, magic use, battle successes, and defeats. Depending on what he sees, he may move you on to the next world or jump you ahead four, seven, or even fifteen. This keeps Populous II perpetually challenging, while never quite pushing you beyond your limits.

The colorful, imaginative screen controls are immediately familiar if you've played the original game. There's an isometric-perspective main map that gives you a close-up view of settlements and battles. You can scroll

to examine other locations or click on a miniature world map for larger jumps. One set of buttons controls game options and general directives to your adoring worshipers. Another group invokes your special powers. Summon storms, raise volcanoes, spread the plague, renew damaged land, build roads, or erect city walls and bridges. The more people there are, the more magic weight you get to throw around.

You can also create your own worlds in Populous II, controlling every facet from terrain type to the smarts of your computerized opponent. You can even play these scenarios between two human opponents, using a modem or a null modem cable.

Good as Populous II is, there's room for improvement. The manual is tiny and undecipherable. And to run this program with a sound card, you have to scrape together a whopping 618K of conventional memory.

But memory requirements and docs aside, Bullfrog is on a roll. Populous II, with its roll-your-own world feature, will keep you battling long after Bullfrog finishes its next game.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster); 640K RAM, 272K-1040K EMS; DOS 3.3 or later (DOS 5.0 recommended); VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster; mouse required; $59.95

POWERMONGER

Weary of playing the virtual god in Populous? Enjoy SimCity and Civilization? **Powermonger** is right up your alley. Designed by the U.K.'s Bullfrog, distributed by Electronic Arts, Powermonger satisfies that lust in all of us – for power, power, more power – and lays stunning graphics atop a strategic framework.

This is a game that's not only fun to play, but offers just the right amount of strategic head-butting for everyone but the hard-core gamer. Powermonger makes you a leader of a people in search of land. Here you give orders to your followers and watch them carry out their ordained tasks.

Powermonger's display is instantly familiar to Populous players – a chunk of land shows in a skewed, isometric view, while the surrounding board is packed with command icons. The three-dimensional landscape teems with anthill-like activity – people, boats, water, and storms – and in astounding detail.

The playing field, or world, consists of 195 areas to subdue and conquer. While a simulated 3-D display shows the immediate area, a sidebar full-world map lets you jump around and see what's doing on the other side of the mountains. Your choice of commands is simple but cover everything a power-hungry leader could need – move, attack, gather food, conscript men, invent, trade, offer alliance, and spy.

The world of Powermonger functions realistically. For instance, the inhabitants have various activities, professions, and habits. Sheep and shepherds dot the landscape, the seasons come and go. With your mouse, you can zoom in and out of various parts of the world, examine objects and inhabitants, delve into their settlements and activities, and, of course, give orders.

Powermonger also offers the option for two-player modem play, a sure way to add dimension to the game. In fact, Powermonger is downright elegant, from its interface and display to its entertaining game mechanics. This game has a deceptively addictive quality to match its playability and graphical look.

And with the promise of future data disks, you'll be able to happily monger some power for months to come.

NOT RATED

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (800) 245-4525; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $49.95

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2: THE SHADOW AND THE FLAME

With its amazing sword-fighting action, leaps of faith, magic potions, lifelike animation, and logic-bending mazes, Broderbund's **Prince of Persia 2** is an exciting magic carpet ride where you'll die the proverbial thousand deaths.

Like its predecessor, Prince of Persia 2 is something of a scrolling arcade game. The character moves through dungeons – running, climbing up walls, and jumping over gaping holes and obstacles. Various switches in the floor open and close gates in the maze, and magic potions found along the way heal wounds while others weaken or affect you in different ways. And some are essential to getting through the levels. You'll also cross swords with royal guards, skeletons, and dangerous disembodied heads. The fight movements, which are simple to operate, consist of realistic blocks and strikes.

Your nemesis in Prince of Persia 2 is the evil Grand Vizier Jafar. Previously, you foiled Jafar's plot to marry the Sultan's daughter and rule the kingdom. After exposing Jafar's treachery, the Sultan let you marry his daughter and gave you the status and rights of a prince. Shortly after the Sultan leaves, Jafar conjures up his brand of low-down magic to assume your identity. As the guards try to seize you, you run and make your crashing exit through a glass window. So begins your adventure.

You find yourself on the palace rooftops with guards at every turn. Pull out that sword and start hacking. Eventually, you can make your escape and end up on a deserted island. There, you progress through the is-

land's dungeons and ultimately travel to the ruins of a once-great civilization. Booby traps, perils, and magic abound, and you'll have to try everything to get back at Jafar. As in the first game, timing – particularly with the running jumps – is key.

The game's graphics are a visual feast, and introduction and transitions feature a digitized voice that narrates the story against some exquisite illustrations. The music and audio effects evoke the appropriate mood for the exotic locale and the heart-pounding situations.

With Prince of Persia 2: The Shadow and the Flame, say "Open Sesame" to high adventure, Arabian nights style.

Running, leaping, slashing – that's all part of the action in Brøderbund's Prince of Persia 2.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

***Brøderbund**, 500 Redwood Blvd., Novato, CA 94948-6121, (800) 521-6263; IBM PC or compatible (10 MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM (2MB RAM required for digital sounds); DOS 3.1 or later; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, IBM PS/1 Option Card, Roland MT-32/CM-32L/LAPC-1, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, and Sound Source; requires hard-disk drive with at least 6.5MB free space; $69.95*

PUTT-PUTT JOINS THE PARADE

Putt-Putt Joins the Parade is one of the most cleverly concocted kids' games ever. It's a delight to play, and its animation and sound are amazing.

Putt-Putt is a little purple car who hears all about the upcoming Cartown Parade on his car radio and decides he'd like to enter. Trouble is, all the entrants are supposed to bring a pet and a balloon. With that simple premise, Putt-Putt takes off on an on-the-road adventure to talk to his friend Smoky the fire engine about how to get in the parade.

Anyone who's old enough to hold a mouse or joystick will love Putt-Putt's world. The animation is truly delightful, and each new screen offers plenty of exploratory objects for kids to click on. As in most adventures, some objects are things Putt-Putt will need to solve problems, but most are there just for fun.

Putt-Putt Joins the Parade is designed to let youngsters explore freely, just for the fun of it. There's no way for kids to make a mistake or get Putt-Putt into trouble. If you forgot something you need, go back and get it. If you try a solution to a problem and it doesn't work, try something else.

Putt-Putt's easy to get up and running, too. Installation instructions run just a paragraph or so, and a list of a few key commands tells you how to toggle the game features on and off. Beyond that, the manual is really a coloring book; the package is so kid-crazy that it even includes a pencil, a pencil sharpener, and a box of crayons.

A couple of things may keep Putt-Putt from becoming an endless source of entertainment. The ad-

Putt-Putt Joins the Parade is a first-rate kids' game, perfect for preschoolers.

Putt-Putt may not march in a parade in his Fun Pack, but he does offer up a handful of cute children's games.

venture is very easy to solve. Even though it's aimed at kids three to seven, few near the upper range will take more than a half hour to get through the game. Other than that, Putt-Putt is first-rate fun.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Humongous Entertainment, 13110 NE 177th Pl., #180, Woodinville, WA 98072-9965, (206) 485-1212; IBM PC or compatible (12MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, Covox, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, and Sound Source; $49.95

PUTT-PUTT'S FUN PACK

Kids will love **Putt-Putt's Fun Pack**, especially if they've already taken a spin with the character in Putt-Putt Joins the Parade. This time, though, rather than a single adventure, Putt-Putt's ready to play any one of half a dozen games.

Any kid who can point and click with a mouse will be able to play without grownups butting in. The games range from very easy to fairly difficult, and every one is full of colorful and clever animated cartoon graphics to keep children amused.

In Tic-Tac-Toe, Putt-Putt plays against you on any one of four levels. Then there's Pinball, though this isn't the flipper-and-flashing-lights kind you'd expect. It's more of a peg board on which players place pegs and then angle them to create mazes, traps, and runways for marbles.

Even adults will enjoy staring across the checkerboard at Putt-Putt. The easy levels give three-year-olds a fair chance at winning, but the hardest level turns Putt-Putt into a savvy opponent. Cheese King is a variation of Hangman, except here you see a picture, and you've got to either click on the appropriate letters from the alphabet at the top of the screen or type them in using the keyboard. A wheel of cheese divided into six pieces shows at the bottom, so when you make a wrong guess, the rodent Cheese King takes a slice.

Remember! is Putt-Putt's version of the game Concentration. The object is to match pairs of face-down picture cards. In Circus Puzzle Blocks, six circus scenes are jumbled up on nine blocks. You click on each block until you match all the heads, bodies, and circus props to create one of the scenes.

Putt-Putt's Fun Pack has about everything a parent – and a kid – could want. Youngsters will have loads of fun, and parents will appreciate the thinking and basic computer skills exercised. If you've got kids around the house, get a copy of Fun Pack.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Humongous Entertainment, 13110 NE 177th Place, #180, Woodinville, WA 98072-9965, (206) 485-1212; IBM PC or compatible (12 MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, Covox, SoundBlaster, and Sound Source; $32.00

QUARKY AND QUAYSOO'S TURBO SCIENCE

Sierra's **Quarky and Quaysoo's Turbo Science** is the always lively, often wacky, sometimes irreverent game that makes physical science snap, crackle, and pop for children ages 9 to 14. Turbo Science plays like a cartoon, and it casts you as the lead character.

When you pair up with space elf Quarky O'Ghandi or his sister Quaysoo to form the Los Turbos team, you get to take on Das Liquidators in races around Elk Jaw County's 20 landmarks. Not only must you defeat the opposing team in a single game, but you must play a series of games to progress through six levels.

Suffice it to say that Turbo Science fun doesn't end after just a few hours' play. Because you can choose easy or hard questions, the game can be customized for younger and older children. Turbo Science isn't just for the family room; the game would make an enticing addition to a science classroom or school computer lab.

At each pit stop, you earn money by answering questions related to specific areas of scientific inquiry: aerodynamics, chemistry, electricity, energy, optics, and thermodynamics. After you secure appropriate fund-

ing, you select a mode of transportation (with different prices) to help you zoom to the next checkpoint. Turbo Science's checkpoints are imaginative. Each scene features humorous graphics, clever animation, and engaging sound effects.

Turbo Science's questions are in multiple-choice format. Some of the program's 2300-plus questions challenge you to use the Turbo Science virtual toolbox to find the correct answer. In the toolbox you'll find thermometer, scale, measuring tape, light meter, sound meter, voltmeter, and beaker. When a question asks, *Which container holds 7 oz. of liquid?*, click on the tools button and select the appropriate instrument.

If you're 9 to 14, you are definitely a cool dude or dudette. And you expect no less from the games you play on your PC. Quarky and Quaysoo's Turbo Science couldn't be more radical. The game features gold-medal graphics, awesome animation, rad music, and gazillions of sound effects.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Sierra/Dynamix, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland MT32, SoundBlaster, and Thunderboard; mouse required; $49.95

QUEST FOR GLORY I

Sierra has finished a face-lift on one of its most popular games and ended up with **Quest For Glory I: So You Want To Be A Hero**. Originally released in 1989 as Hero's Quest, Quest For Glory I reintroduces itself with a prettier graphics face. But if you've played the original, there's little reason to plunk down your hard-earned clams for this, no matter how dazzling the images and enhanced interface may be.

Quest For Glory I is a hybrid graphic adventure/fantasy role-playing game. Quest looks like a graphic adventure with a point-and-click interface, and it includes some fairly traditional adventure game–like puzzles. But it also contains a few role-playing elements, from a handful of spells to its town and country settings. The combination adds up in the end.

You can play a thief, fighter, or magic user, and there are attributes to modify. Because each character class exposes you to situations that others never see, Quest can actually be replayed. Your character begins in the town of Spielburg, a full-of-woe place just waiting for an ambitious adventurer like you. Brigands terrorize the townsfolk, and a witch has kidnapped the local baron's kids. You must learn the right skills, pick up some information, and arm yourself for the tasks ahead.

The first thing you'll notice about Quest is its animation and 256-color graphics. The paintinglike landscapes common in Sierra games are here, too, along with clay-mation animation that makes the figures' movement fluid and realistic.

Combat in Quest for Glory I remains real time, and you control your character's offensive and defensive movements. After you've practiced fighting monsters in the forest, you'll be able to tackle the brigands and witch and move onto greater things.

If you've not seen the original, you're in for some fun. Quest is a hybrid that opens up the traditional adventure game with its role-playing elements. But it's hard to believe that many would buy the same game twice just to admire the nice view.

NOT RATED

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93644, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (10MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, SoundBlaster, Sound Source, and Thunderboard; mouse recommended; $59.95

RAGNAROK

Ragnarok is the end of the world, Viking style, a time when gods, giants, and bank-sized monsters get together, invoke their powers, and kill each other off.

Ragnarok is also the name of a new role-playing fantasy where the forces of evil – demons, giants, and minions of death – have decided to weight the odds in their favor for the upcoming Big Event by stealing several of the gods' superweapons. As an unknown, unsung hero, you've dedicated your life to reclaiming that lost cutlery and winning the gods' favor.

Unfortunately, Ragnarok is an unforgiving, sadistic game that's almost impossible to navigate. There are no moral, political, or economic considerations to get in the way of a simple fight. There are also no conversations and no potential adversaries to win over. Visuals are old-fashioned but stylishly done, with simple, 16-color VGA icons set in a top-down, two-dimensional tiled frame. Keyboard controls are listed on an enclosed reference card, and most mouse commands are displayed for easy access on the screen. There's good on-line help available at the press of a function key. And the realm is huge with a variety of objects and abilities to match.

The inhabitants of Ragnarok are *remarkably* sadistic. Unlike Wizardry, Ultima, or the SSI worlds, the Ragnarokian universe is completely stacked against you. You start out with minor weapons, a couple of one-use-only magical items, and a few hit points, while the legions of enemies have lots of power and seem to know exactly where you are.

Ragnarok's lack of plot, puzzles, music, nonplayer character interaction, 3-D views, and 256-color images will turn off most gamers. More conservative D&D types, however, will relish Ragnarok's fiendish monsters, endless challenge, and well-developed gaming system.

NOT RATED

Norsehelm, P.O. Box 494388, Redding CA 96049-4388, (800) 892-3488; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.3 or later; $59.95

RAGS TO RICHES

Dirty deals, industrial spying, insider trading, illegal tips – it's just business. It's also **Rags to Riches**, the new financial market simulation from Interplay Productions.

Rags to Riches puts its financial simulation into the real-world context of international news, backroom informants, and executive megalomaniacs. The inadequate manual aside, I'm bullish on this money sim.

As you'd expect, you'll trade stocks and commodities, sell short, follow the trends, or buck the establishment with your investment genius. You can also exploit the soft underbelly of hardcore finance by currying favor with informants, listening to backroom tips, and even placing moles in the offices of your competition.

The reward isn't just high totals in the ledger book: You'll have the opportunity to enlarge your client base, improve your office, hit the mall and purchase the material spoils of success, and expand into international trading arenas.

At its center, Rags to Riches is a solid, if simplified, simulation of world finance. You start the sim with $200,000. With your first office open, you're ready to leap into high-rolling profits. Your first task is to hire a secretary and a pit runner. Later, as your riches grow, you can hire lawyers, apprentices, accountants, and informants.

To make the simulation manageable, Interplay has reduced the trading opportunities to four categories: gold, bonds, blue chip stocks, and oil. To help you track the hills and valleys of the monetary landscape, you can view short- and long-term performance graphs for each commodity.

The 16-color VGA and 256-color SVGA graphics are decorative, not much more. Sound effects are intrusive; ditto, the office radio. Fortunately, you can turn them off.

The major failing of this otherwise effective simulation is the manual. You *cannot* learn about the game just by playing it. You'll need to go elsewhere to find definitions for terms and explanations for concepts used in the game.

If you're an experienced financial dabbler, you'll probably enjoy the pace and challenge of Rags to Riches. Beginners, though, might be largely confused. With some financial background, you'll discover that Rags to Riches is one of the most involving financial sims on the market.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Interplay, 17922 Fitch Ave., Irvine, CA 92714, (714) 553-6678; IBM PC or compatible; VGA; DOS 3.1 or later; $59.95

READING ADVENTURES IN OZ

Davidson's **Reading Adventures in Oz** transforms *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* into an interactive, educational scavenger hunt, flush with animated graphics images, music, sounds, and digitized speech. Oz comes to life PC-style each time your four-to nine-year-old child journeys to the City of Emeralds. Your favorite munchkins can play the game as Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tin Boy, or Lion Cub.

But Reading Adventures in Oz is more than just a game. Kids learn to spell new words, solve riddles, recognize parts of speech, and even follow detailed instructions. What more could the average parent or teacher ask?

The program's three dozen brightly colored, imaginatively illustrated scenes feature objects clustered around a specific theme. Household appliances, musical instruments, animals, clocks and timepieces, and kitchen utensils are just some of the props your child can explore during his or her travels along the Yellow Brick Road. The strategy that works best when you don't know what to expect next is one that comes naturally to kids: Click on everything in sight. When you click on an object, a name tag almost always pops up, showing kids new words or reinforcing the meaning or contextual setting of familiar terms.

A well-placed mouse click can really get things moving, too. You can precipitate a volcanic eruption or coax Polychrome and Button Bright to play frisbee, to name a couple. Reading Adventures' sound effects include rock music, animal chatter, and munchkin giggles.

In the easiest of the game's three levels, preschoolers explore the land of Oz freestyle, learning new words and associating them with objects. At higher levels, learning becomes more structured or goal oriented as the child tries to find the Wizard's messenger in each scene. Messengers challenge kids to solve language problems, such as finding a word that ends with *n*.

Thanks to Davidson & Associates, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz has* moved to the PC, where Reading Adventures makes children self-directed participants in their own learning. It doesn't take a wiz to see the value in that.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Davidson & Associates, 19840 Pioneer Ave., Torrance, CA 90503, (800) 545-7677, (800) 556-6141; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 3.3 or later; VGA; supports Echo II PC, IBM Speech Adaptor, IBM ACPA, ProAudio Spectrum 16/Plus, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, Sound Galaxy, Sound Source, Speech Thing, and ThunderBoard; mouse required; hard-disk drive with at least 5MB free space required; $59.95

REBEL SPACE

Prodigy's **Rebel Space** is a tribute to both the virtue of straightforward simplicity and to a game's ability to drape

Prodigy's Rebel Space is a multiplayer strategy game that lets you beat real opponents, not the computer.

itself in a sort of digital Emperor's Clothes. You can learn the rudiments of this galactic empire-building game in a wink, get into the thick of things overnight, and finish a game in as little as five weeks – all the while never feeling that what you're about is at all simple.

This game is an elegant 50-player version of the classic game of conquest set against the background of a collapsing empire. Playing the game is as much of a breeze as using Prodigy. You can configure Rebel Space to fit your schedule, playing anywhere from two to five turns per week. The plain-speaking documentation can be sent straight to your printer and is laden with hints and good advice.

There's nothing too complex in taking your turn, either. You simply set directions for your four starships in this galaxy, indicate which of seven all-important modules each ship will collect upon docking at a friendly starbase, and choose which rebellion (Militarist, Scientist, or Environmentalist), if any, you want to join.

The next morning, the results turn up in your electronic mailbox – as much as 20 to 30 pages listing, among

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other things, planets taken, the progress planetary civilizations and ecologies have made, battles fought, and damage sustained and inflicted.

At first, it's a big, empty galaxy. But as you begin to wander away from the central axis of starbases and jump points, you'll begin to run into planets – Stone Age planets, Edenlike planets, industrial planets, and, at length, somebody else's planets. Before long, you'll find there are almost chesslike intricacies to movement, such as adding modifications and building your planetary network. There's also the human element.

There's no way to send messages within the game, but once you're out of it and in the Stargate Cafe, chops are busted, victories crowed over, and promises broken. To skip the Stargate is to play the game wearing a blindfold.

The creators of Rebel Space stayed close to the basics, with results at once pleasant and immensely accessible.

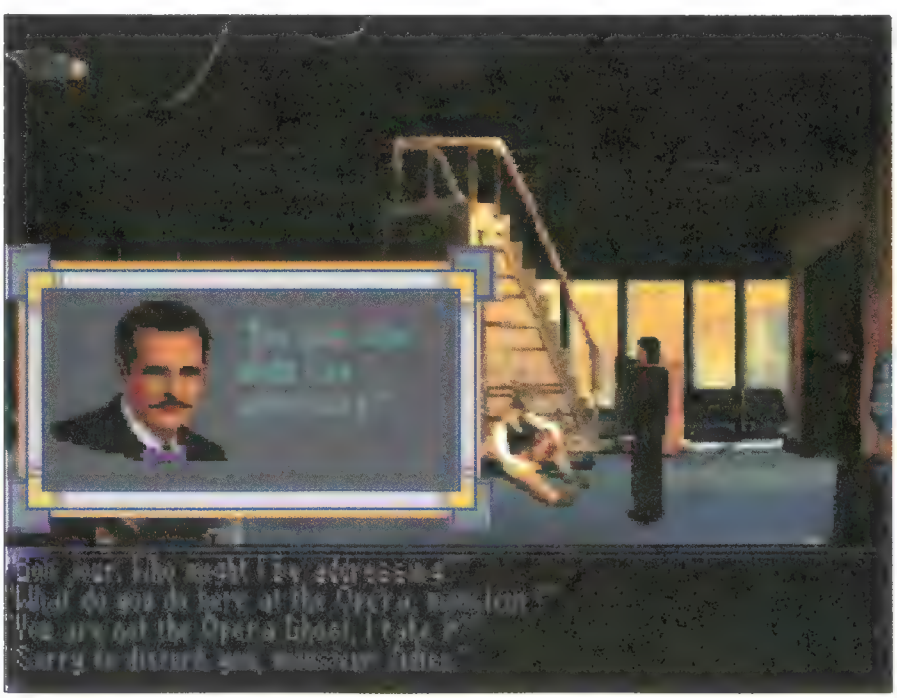
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Prodigy, 445 Hamilton Ave., White Plains, NY 10601, (800) 776-3449; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM; DOS 2.0 or later; Hercules/CGA/EGA/VGA/MCGA; requires 1200- or 2400-bps modem; printer recommended; $24.95 25-turn game, $49.95 Prodigy Startup Kit, $14.95 monthly fee

RETURN OF THE PHANTOM

Return of the Phantom is an engaging Gothic thriller where you play the part of Raoul Montand. As a detective with the French version of the FBI and opera patron, your evening's entertainment at the Paris Opera House takes an unusual turn when the chandelier comes crashing down on several genteel spectators. You agree to investigate, only to find clues and rumors that point to a culprit who engineered a similar tragedy over a century ago – the infamous Phantom of the Opera.

The Phantom combines first-rate animated graphics, an effective soundtrack, and a clever storyline to produce a thoroughly enjoyable story. The digitized animation is always impressively realistic. The sound effects include heavy organ music reverberating through the dark hallways, doors creaking and squeaking as they open, and footsteps echoing in the damp, forbidding catacombs.



MicroProse's Return of the Phantom adventure game is horror, pure and simple.

This adventure may be heavy with atmosphere and mystery, but it's not a particularly difficult one to solve. You can choose from Novice or Challenging play modes, though until you get down into the catacombs they're identical. At that point, the Challenging mode offers more difficult puzzles and a much more complex maze. Even then, it's still nothing that will frustrate seasoned adventurers for long.

There are times, though, when you'll find your lack of control annoying. The conversations you hold with other characters are a simple multiple-choice exercise, for instance: You can't really ask your own questions.

For a game this well-crafted, its copy protection is clunky. When counting the requisite lines on page *X*, are you supposed to count subheadings and blank lines? There were times when I couldn't get it right, even after a couple of tries, and got booted back to DOS.

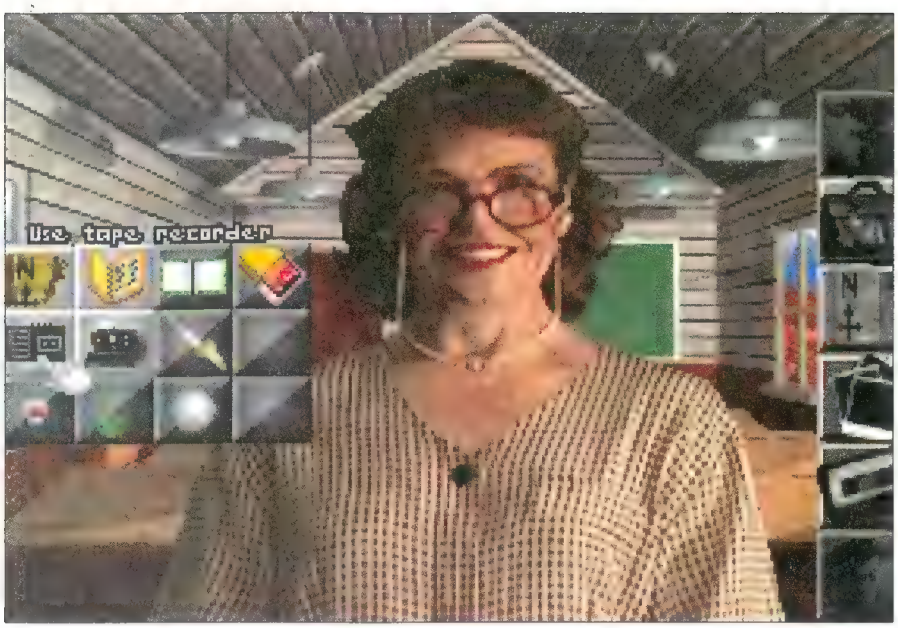
Copy protection problems aside, Return of the Phantom is a sit-back-and-enjoy kind of game, one filled with wonderful graphics, music, mystery, and enough dramatic twists and turns to keep you going for hours. Don't miss this one.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 2MB RAM; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, ProAudio Spectrum, and SoundBlaster; $59.95

RETURN TO ZORK

More than fifteen years after its first release, Zork returns, literally, in Activision's **Return To Zork**. And it ain't text, baby. Return To Zork has all the humor, puzzles, and frivolity of



This isn't your dad's text adventure. Zork returns in a lively, visual extravaganza.

the originals, and then some.

Like a nightmare, your quest begins with one big question: What's going on here? Finding the answer is what Return To Zork is all about. As the story opens, 700 years after Beyond Zork, you find yourself the winner of a sweepstakes: a four-day vacation in the Valley of the Sparrows. But it doesn't take long to figure out it's no Club Med – the first sign you see reads *Valley of the Vultures.*

Graphically speaking, Return to Zork is gorgeous. High-res stills complemented by occasional animated overlays makes for a visually satisfying game, even on the floppy disk version. Navigation through this world is less impressive in some ways. Return forgoes a true three-dimensional perspective for a more traditional connective tissue of one-screen-at-a-time presentation.

Return operates with points and clicks. Forward, turn around, left, right, up, and down are represented by arrow pointers when those directions are possible, and commands appear only when you need them. Most icons, such as Talk or Ask About, are animated and easy to understand. Talk to a character, and a row of conversation buttons appears at the side of the screen. You can even steer conversations by changing the mood from friendly to angry.

Keeping track of information is simplified in Return to Zork with a handy pop-up digital recorder, which automatically records conversations. You're also equipped with a camera that pastes a picture in your photo album. Later, you can use both the tape and the photos to drag more information from characters you meet.

Like the original Zork titles, Return is busting at the seams with puzzles. Some practically solve themselves after you've gathered certain objects and information, while others are impossible to solve without a meaty hint or two from Activision.

All told, Return To Zork excites, captivates, frustrates, and satisfies old friends of the original Zork and has a good shot at capturing a huge chunk of fresh adventure meat.

NOT RATED

Activision, 11440 San Vicente Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049, (310) 207-4500; IBM PC or compatible (20MHz 386 or faster); 600K free RAM (supports XMS and EMS if available); VGA; hard-disk drive with at least 30MB free space required; $79.95

REX NEBULAR AND THE COSMIC GENDER BENDER

Rex Nebular and the Cosmic Gender Bender may be Microprose's answer to Sierra's Roger Wilco – Sierra's galactic janitor – but it provides a few big laughs of its own.

Rex Nebular is structured as a flashback: Rex recovers a vase for an erstwhile employer, and relates his story of travail and woe. You must guide this misguided spaceboy up and out of his dilemma, helping him find the vase and a new ship to boot.

Rex Nebular's story posits a planet populated solely by women (the designers obviously wanted to share their fantasies with the rest of us). On this world, women won the gender war and did away with the hairier sex. No men, unfortunately, means no babies, so they've turned to technology – the Gender Bender – to reverse a person's sex to help repopulate the planet. The Gender Bender even lets you play Rex as a woman in order to infiltrate the goings-on.

The game's interface avoids the icon-fest Sierra has unleashed. A small list of general verbs is available, and each object has its own special verbs, too. Puzzle solving suffers from the universal interface syndrome: graphic adventure puzzles seem to decline to the level of a pixel hunt, whether you're opening the right compartment, finding the necessary item, or discovering all the exits.

At its novice setting, Rex Nebular is appropriately easy. Advanced and expert settings let you turn up the difficulty. Even then, though, Rex is an essentially linear game, with the occasional backtrack to retrieve a necessary item left behind. The graphics are well done, easily equaling those of Sierra's Space Quest series. But while it certainly hasn't fumbled the ball, neither has MicroProse advanced graphic adventuring by any meaningful amount.

If you're hankering for a different approach when the science fiction adventure bug hits you, don't wait for the next Space Quest. Rex Nebular lets you put on a dress without a guilty conscience. And maybe you'll laugh about it, too.

NOT RATED

MicroProse Software, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM (1MB-2MB recommended); VGA; hard-disk drive; supports AdLib, Covox, Roland, ProAudio Spectrum, and SoundBlaster; $69.95

RINGWORLD

Ringworld: Revenge of the Patriarch has the ragged edges that betray a first effort. This rather traditional animated adventure, based around Larry Niven's 1970 science-fiction novel of the same name, casts you as Quinn, a mercenary and member of a three-person team searching the planet for "stasis" boxes containing ancient technology.

But alas, things are amiss. First off, there's a general stiffness to character movement and screen scrolling, and this stiffness extends into the storytelling. Each segment mechanically follows the one before it. Without branches in the plot or any real choice in where to go or what to do next, This isn't game-playing but electronic storytelling instead.

Ringworld misses an even bigger chance when it omits cooperation between the three members of the party. You control only Quinn. And the news gets worse. Most of Ringworld's puzzles are relatively simple and sparse, though some are difficult only because necessary objects have been exquisitely camouflaged. You'll have to get very touchy-feely with the mouse pointer to sort them from their backgrounds. At least the graphics are serviceable in most cases, with an attractively ragged look to some of the outdoor scenes.

The storytelling is sloppy, too. Presumably, Ringworld the book isn't a prerequisite for playing Ringworld the game, but a good deal of Ringworld-specific info – names, places, peoples – is thrust at you early on, and will be almost certainly lost on most players.

And what's a 3-D arcade game doing here? Mercifully, there's only one, and it can either be repeated until you get it right or skipped entirely.

A famous science-fiction novel comes to limited adventure-game life in Ringworld.

There's *some* promise here. The interface is appealingly simple: look, walk, touch, talk, use, with the usual disk and sound options. Ringworld also sports some nice special effects. It's also refreshing to see a serious science-fiction adventure – one more concerned with science fiction itself than making light of it.

Keep Ringworld – the book. Read it and enjoy. The game? Chuck it.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Tsunami Media, Inc., P.O. Box 790, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (209) 683-8266; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, and SoundBlaster; hard-disk drive with at least 10MB free space required; mouse required; $59.95

RISK FOR WINDOWS

The classic board game Risk comes to the PC intact in Virgin Game's **Risk for Windows**. It includes a few features that make it an even better game under Windows, and it offers some worthwhile enemies.

The goal, of course, is to win the world. Each player (2 to 6, with combinations of human and computer allowed) grabs an equal number of the globe's 42 territories, divides an equal number of armies throughout that domain, and then tries to swallow the opposition. Combat is resolved with dice, just as in the board game, and hinges more on superiority of numbers and a craps-like luck than anything else. A bunch of extras, including bonus reinforcements for holding complete continents and accumulating matched sets of cards, lends a bit of drama to the game.

Though you can wage war against other humans, this game's made to play against artificial opponents. You can set the ferocity of your enemies, making each aggressive, merely assertive, or uninterested in the attack. These opponents may not be bright, but they're enemies worthy of respect. These electronic enemies play smart from the start, when the players divvy

up the world. Because you can set the number of your opponents and their disposition, Risk for Windows makes for fine experimentation.

Risk is good for Windows. Not because of how it looks, but because of the way it lets you play. As in any Windows game, you can bounce in and out of Risk at will, stopping work to run through a few attacks, then going back to the spreadsheet.

Set Risk's speed to fast, and the computer opponents blitz through their turns. The only time the game pauses is when it asks you how stubbornly you want to defend against attack, and, of course, when it's your turn. You can literally play a complete game in ten minutes or so.

Risk for Windows is not only a passable translation from board to monitor, it's also a game that's been tweaked to work within Windows. The end may not be world domination *every* time you play, but it's always worth the trip to the ramparts.

NOT RATED

Virgin Games, 18061 Fitch Ave., Irvine CA 92714, (714) 833-8710; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; Hercules/EGA/VGA; Microsoft Windows 3.0 or later; supports SoundBlaster; mouse required; $49.99

ROAD & TRACK PRESENTS GRAND PRIX UNLIMITED

Driven a good, fast PC lately? Accolade's **Road & Track Presents Grand Prix Unlimited** is a simulator that catapults you into the cockpit of a Formula One race car.

Road & Track's theme is reminiscent of Accolade's older Grand Prix Circuit, in which you raced Formula One cars through a series of international racetracks. In Road & Track you take your pick of the Williams-Renault, McLaren-Honda, and other cars, then lay rubber on tracks such as Monaco, Barcelona, and others in a single race or an entire circuit.

You can customize cars, position cameras for instant replays, and even call for unpredictable weather conditions, such as rain. You can also create your own tracks with the game's course architect. Car customization means more than a fancy paint job and a decal or two. You can modify the machines' type of tires, brake softness, steering radius, and wing profile and drag.

Accolade uses flight-simulator-style graphics images, which turn your perspective into an out-the-windshield look that intensifies the game's you-are-there feeling.

Road & Track accommodates beginners by offering a variety of settings and handicaps. The default is center-lane steering, in which the computer steers while you control the speed. Once you're a competent driver, you can steer on your own. Road & Track also lets you decide the aggressiveness of your opponents. The computer opponents are ruthless at the game'shigher levels – racing at high speeds and blocking your progress at every turn.

Road & Track's course architect, with which you modify existing tracks or create your own, is flexible and easy to use. When you want to review that last great move on the track, Road & Track provides a first-rate instant-replay function.

It's still too easy to get disoriented when you spin off the track, and Road & Track is missing Test Drive III's one-button back-on-the-track feature. The program also sports some minor animation glitches when you drive on some tracks.

With Road & Track you'll get great graphics, detailed cars, and high performance.

NOT RATED

Accolade, 550 S. Winchester Blvd., Suite 200, San Jose, CA, 95128, (408) 296-8400; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; $59.95

ROME: PATHWAY TO POWER

ROME: Pathway to Power is a strategy adventure game published by Maxis. Here's hoping ROME isn't the last role-playing adventure game from Maxis. Designed for intermediate to advanced gamers age ten and up, ROME features a wry wit and a self-deprecating sense of humor.

Even if you don't like your history with a bit of a twist, you'll enjoy the otherwise educational aspects of ROME. Besides the sheer skill you need to win the seat of power, you can play the game in English, Spanish, French, German, or Italian.

ROME: Pathway to Power plays its six levels like a television miniseries. As Hector, a lowly slave who hotfoots it out of Herculaneum just as the volcano Vesuvius begins to belch, you get to take a stab at ascending the emperor's throne. First, though, you must endure a host of difficulties – everything from molten lava and huffy palace guards to a couple of side trips where you unleash troops against the natives.

All's not fun and mayhem, though. You get to make the world a better place by protecting Cleopatra, and along the way meet notables like the Consul Fellonius, the centurian Militarius Conflictus, and the real seat of power, Emperor Gluteus Maximus.

Surviving is hard, but playing is easy. Virtually every game play mechanic is done through ROME's point-and-click interface. And most of the screen's landscape is devoted to the playing field, which displays just one sector of the game's terrain.

Some clever animation makes ROME a pleasure to watch. ROME's theme music is appealing yet undistracting, and sound effects heighten the experience, too.

No, Rome wasn't built in a day, and you won't be able to rule ROME in just a few hours either. Expect to spend days helping Hector survive one challenge after another. (For-

tunately, you can save a game that's in progress.)

In the real world, it's hard to imagine anyone except our elected officials sharing Hector's values or condoning his tactics. But in virtual reality, an emperor's gotta do what an emperor's gotta do.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Maxis, 2 Theatre Sq., Suite 230, Orinda, CA 94563-3346, (800) 336-2947, (510) 254-9700; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.1 or later; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster; $49.95

RUSTY & ROSY – READ WITH ME

Created by the Waterford Institute, **Rusty & Rosy – Read With Me** is like a TV series. Games in the first segment include Catch A Match and Coloring Box. Here, arcade action and artist's tools help children learn to recognize letters, numbers, colors, and shapes. Games in the second series – Treasure Hunt and Word Traveler – focus on more advanced skills, such as phonics and word recognition.

Rusty & Rosy – Read with Me contains a collection of children's games, including this matching puzzle.

You can play Catch A Match liter-

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ally at different levels: Sea, Sky, and Space. Depending upon the "landscape" you select, the game's background scenery and arcade characters recreate an undersea panorama, a balloon-filled sky, or an intergalactic world. The object of each game is to catch fish, pop balloons, or zap aliens who match a target letter, number, shape, size, or color. As each challenge appears, a human voice provides helpful prompts. Coloring Box is a graphics-design program that lets kids explore the world of letters, colors, and shapes. Like a grownup's paint program, Coloring Box offers a toolbox with a pencil, a paint bucket, a straight line, and an eraser. A stamps-and-stickers tool lets you make geometric shapes and populate your drawings with animals and other familiar objects.

Treasure Hunt is a matrix, consisting of as many as 24 or as few as a half-dozen cards. Older kids look for cards with matching letters, numbers, words, or pictures by flipping the cards and memorizing their positions. Younger children can play with the cards face up.

Whether you're playing Word Traveler, Catch A Match, Coloring Box, or Treasure Hunt, Rusty & Rosy – Read With Me has one of the best point-click-and-listen interfaces in children's software.

Even more impressive, adults can adjust the challenge level of each game for a child. Although Rusty & Rosy will be perfectly comfortable in your home, as many as nine users can log into each game, making the program suitable for early learning centers, too.

I won't be surprised if these two spunky raccoons attract a cult following among the preschool set before the year is out.

NOT RATED

Brøderbund, 500 Redwood Blvd., Novato, CA 94948, (800) 521-6263; IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); 4MB RAM; VGA (256-color recommended); Windows 3.1 or Windows 3.0 with Multimedia Extensions; supports most sound cards and the Microsoft PC speaker driver; mouse required; $49.95

SCIENCE ADVENTURE

Science Adventure restores faith in the multimedia movement without demanding that you buy a CD-ROM drive. All it requires is about 8 megabytes of hard-disk space.

Science Adventure combines the well-written prose of Isaac Asimov with impressive photography and sound to create an absorbing journey into the unknown. Science Adventure is so complex it could easily have presented an unfriendly first impression. The program's designers, however,

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THE ONLY THING IT DOESN'T SIMULATE IS EAR POPPING.

If it were any more real, your chair would be in a 30° bank. Our new Microsoft® Flight Simulator™ has four planes, each with its own instrument panel created digitally from actual photographs. There are storm clouds and sunsets to fly into. Crashes are scarily real. And you can fly to airports anywhere in the world. For even more detailed flights, there are New York and Paris scenery enhancements*. Everything is at your reseller. So, take off.

Microsoft Home

*New York and Paris scenery enhancements coming this fall. © 1993 Microsoft Corp. All rights reserved. Microsoft is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corp. Flight Simulator is a trademark of Bruce A. Artwick.

devised a simple point-and-click interface in which icons clearly suggest their purpose.

To move from topic to topic, click just about anywhere. Click on the picture you're reading about, and Science Adventure sends you to a new article on a related topic. Click on any of the category icons – Technology, Life, Earth and Ecology, and others – and go to the next event in that area of scientific expertise. If you have a specific topic you want to investigate, click on the Library icon, then on the card-catalog drawer with the letter that starts the name of your topic.

The program's icons are sharp VGA images, as are the pictures that accompany the text passages. From the opening painting of a medieval man to the photograph of a human fetus, each image is rich, detailed, and well designed. Science Adventure's sound is just as clear played on a Sound-Blaster Pro–equipped PC, and each audio-effect sound is crisp.

The late Isaac Asimov, the science and science-fiction writer, wrote Science Adventure's text. With a master such as Asimov at the helm, it's no surprise that this program's articles are interesting, humorous, and a pleasure to read. Text not only relates information but also explains why the information is important.

Working within the limitations of the typical home computer (one without a CD-ROM drive), the designers at Knowledge Adventure have created an unusually powerful program. You don't even need a sound card unless you can't bear to miss out on the audio effects. Science Adventure makes realistic demands on your PC while delivering extraordinary results.

NOT RATED

Knowledge Adventure, 4502 Dyer St., La Crescenta, CA 91214, (800) 542-4240; IBM PC or compatible; VGA; supports Covox Speech Thing, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, Sound Source, and Thunderboard; hard-disk drive with at least 8MB free space required; mouse recommended; $79.95

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND, CD

Seeking fame and fortune, easy money, and a freewheeling, glamorous way of life? Then join Guybrush Treepwood on Melee Island to search for **The Secret of Monkey Island**. Pirates and hidden treasure live on in this CD-ROM version of LucasArt's game, offering excellent graphics, music, and sound effects.

Monkey Island's plot is straightforward. You must master three things: the sword, the art of thievery, and the search for treasure, then crew a ship to the forbidden Monkey Island and rescue the love of your life. The characters are insolent yet hilarious, the puzzles challenge your imagination, and the story line keeps you chuckling.

The clean, simple interface makes navigating a snap. The bottom section offers a vocabulary of nouns collected in your icon-based inventory and an ample supply of verbs, such as *give, use, look at, open, push,* and *pick up*. You move through scenes and construct sophisticated interactive sentences through a point-and-click system. A new auto-highlight feature spotlights an appropriate verb when the cursor touches an object on screen. The same feature works with the dialog choices, resulting in a logical progression of story dialog.

Developing your skills as a master of the sword requires a lot of dueling practice, or rather *insult* practice. You must develop an articulate tongue before you confront the sharpest of tongues, the Sword Master.

Unlike many other CDs, Monkey Island doesn't put voice to its characters. The Calypso and reggae music, though, is just unbelievable. Just as good are the game's dazzling sound effects.

This adventure's plot, sense of humor, and interesting characters are commendable. With its spineless pirates and the trials you must endure, and The Secret of Monkey Island offers many hours of humorous adventure for the entire family.

NOT RATED

LucasArts (distributed by Software Toolworks), 60 Leveroni Ct., Novato, CA 94949, (415) 883-3000; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM; DOS 3.1 or later; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster-compatible; CD-ROM drive required; $79.95

SHADOW PRESIDENT

As your teachers told you, any kid can grow up to be president. And now, anyone with a PC and D.C. True's insightful and intelligent **Shadow President** can pretend to play the role. For some, the action may be too cerebral and slow, but for others, the chance to play President is compelling enough to make this simulation fun.

The date is June 1, 1990 and you're the president. Depending on your actions, how might the world be different today? Shadow President is an interactive simulation where *you* carry out foreign policy and control domestic issues, and every action carries potential rewards or risks. You can become a hero and watch your popularity soar, or make bad decisions that take your ratings below even Clinton's. You might even be thrown out of office in disgrace or assassinated.

Your eyes and ears are your Cabinet members. These men and women relay the happenings around the world and at home and advise you on your alternatives.

The main screen features a world map where you select specific countries and regional areas for closer inspection. Pick a country, and your advisors will keep you abreast of events, each in his or her own area of expertise. Although in-depth, the advice and updates from the Cabinet get repetitious. You'll spend a lot of time

reading when you play Shadow President.

Based on the situation, you choose actions you think necessary. Do you want to improve diplomatic relations, strengthen economic ties, aid rebels in another country, or take military actions? Domestically, you can raise or lower taxes and set the budget. What makes Shadow President worthwhile is that it's a simulation in the same vein as SimCity. You measure yourself against the agenda you've set for your term in office.

Shadow President is thorough. You can access economic, social, quality of life, and military facts on some 150 countries. The game also includes a CIA World Factbook that's up-to-date for the game's timespan.

With intriguing subject matter, timely situations, and methodical and stimulating gameplay, Shadow President gets my vote.

NOT RATED

D.C. True, Ltd., 1840 Oak Ave., Evanston, Illinois 60201-3686, (708) 866-1864; IBM PC or compatible (12MHz or faster recommended); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, Echo II, Media Master, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, Sound Master I & II, Sound Source, Speech Thing, Voice Adaptor, Voice Master, and Talking Technology; mouse required; $69.95

SHADOWGATE FOR WINDOWS

Oh no! The evil Warlock has taken over the Castle Shadowgate. Oh no! The Behemoth will destroy the world! Oh no! *You're* the only one who can enter the castle gates and foil the villain's plans! Oh no! It's another fantasy adventure game with the same old plot!

The plot of **Shadow for Windows** may be more worn than the carpet in a Motel 6, but at least it's familiar. We may not walk into these digital horror-fests looking for a fresh story line, but we do expect to find a new world of clever and creative puzzles to keep us entertained.

That's where this new Windows-based version of Shadowgate fails. Sure, it's challenging. Sure, it offers point-of-view graphics, a slick graphical interface, and a wealth of difficult and complicated puzzles. But Shadowgate is a paint job of dazzling graphics and audio effects slapped overtop a rusty mental exercise that's really no different from than those monochrome, text-based adventures of a decade ago.

Shadowgate certainly *looks* impressive, But once you've been through a few dark rooms and hallways and faced a few foes, you'll realize that you haven't entered an unfamiliar world after all. The game's puzzles, though difficult enough to satisfy the most demanding player, often require more trial-and-error persistence than careful logic.

You'd better beware of red herrings, too, for Shadowgate is full of them. You'll die a thousand deaths trying to get certain items or get to certain passageways that you can see but not reach. And then when you finally make it, they're just decoys. That's fair, right?

Shadowgate isn't a great adventure, but it *is* a good one. Even though the plot is nothing new and its puzzles too often demand persistence rather than thought, the game is visually fun. If you're a devoted Windows fan and looking for a new game to run under your favorite interface, Shadowgate's just the thing. For the rest of us, its pretty paint can't disguise an old machine underneath.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

ICOM Simulations, Inc., 648 S. Wheeling Rd., Wheeling, IL 60090-9981, (708) 520-4440; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 4MB RAM; Super VGA; Windows 3.1 or later; DOS 3.3 or later; supports Windows-compatible sound boards; hard-disk drive with at least 8MB free space required; mouse required; $39.95

SHADOWLANDS

You can tell a lot about a game from the way it looks, and visually **Shadowlands** is a disappointment. It isn't atmospheric, just dingy, with plenty of washed-out grays, browns, rusts, and blacks. The line drawings resemble a second-stage sketch rather than a finished product, and the images of your four team heroes are identical on the isometric landscape: squat objects with feet that resemble walking mushrooms.

Even in close-up, these characters look too much alike. The slight portrait variations the game lets you make are so poor as to verge on the insulting.

Shadowlands' game controls are complex enough to be self-defeating. Instead of using a simple attack command, you must highlight the Action Hand on a character's Action Portrait. Then you click on the figure you want to attack, who flashes white. But if a tree is in the way, nothing happens.

You're forced to highlight the Walk Leg to maneuver your hero around that tree, then the Action Hand again to attack. But don't highlight the wrong hand or leg. Use the other hand, the Transit Hand, for collecting and operating. The other leg, the Lead Leg, calls the other characters to follow you.

You determine each of your four heroes' stats – combat, magic, health, and strength – drawing on a pool of available points. Otherwise they're simple clones, called Magician, Warrior, Priest, and Orc.

Comparisons between Shadowlands and a few other recent releases are telling, and what they tell isn't in Shadowlands' favor. Thumbs down, then, on Shadowlands. This game is for genre fanatics only.

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Domark, 5300 Stevens Creek Blvd., Suite 500, San Jose, CA 95129, (800) 245-7744, (415) 513-8929; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports

AdLib and SoundBlaster; mouse required; $39.95

SHERLOCK HOLMES, CONSULTING DETECTIVE

Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective is a massive opus from ICOM Simulations. Designed for CD-ROM, it's as delightful an introduction to the pleasures of laser gaming as you're likely to find.

At Consulting Detective's heart is a basic follow-the-names detective game. Consulting Detective stresses careful attention to conversations and the people and places referenced in them. One leads to another, and that to two more, and before you know it you've built yourself a nice little puzzle which may point in any of several directions. That's Consulting Detective's strength – it forces you to deduce.

How to manage this? You click on eight icons that bracket a map of central London. From here, you can check eight two-page issues of *The Times* for clues, summon dozens of names from Holmes' London directory, consult the characters' background files, dispatch the Baker Street Irregulars to check them out, or pay them a personal visit. If someone's home, a video screen pops up at center screen, with VCR-style controls beneath, and plays out the ensuing scene in full color and backed by a crystal-clear digitized soundtrack. Consulting Detective's images aren't quite broadcast quality, but the effect is extraordinary and the impression lasting.

Then when you think you've made the necessary connections, you'll take the case to court to be quizzed on whodunit and why you think so.

While all this ear and eye tinsel is enchanting, it's still tinsel. Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective is more like an edited cut of a movie than anything. Moreover, those segments are noninteractive. Then again, since these segments are bound to mountains of video and audio, even one set of alternate approaches would have popped the game over the single-CD size.

Both volumes of Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective rely on video to tell their tales.

This can be downright absorbing stuff, and it may not even occur to you for a while that there are *three* complete adventures here, each with its own elaborate cast of characters, acted scenes, and soundtracks. The game is afoot.

NOT RATED

ICOM Simulations, Inc., 648 S. Wheeling Rd., Wheeling, IL 60090-9950, (800) 877-4266; IBM PC or compatible (12MHz or faster); 640K RAM; DOS 3.3 or later; CD-ROM drive and mouse required; VGA; supports MediaVision and SoundBlaster; $69.95

SHERLOCK HOLMES CONSULTING DETECTIVE: VOL. II

As its name suggests, the CD-ROM-based **Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective: Volume II** is the follow-up to ICOM Simulations' immensely popular and successful first Holmes mystery. In Consulting Detective, Holmes moved and spoke and deduced in full-motion, color video clips. Now Volume II of the series exercises our logical "chops" with three more befuddling capers: The Two Lions, The Pilfered Paintings, and The Murdered Munitions Magnate.

If you enjoyed the first CD, you'll take to the sequel because this volume is more of the same. Enhancements are few, but the video clips are richer in color. And, of course, you get 90 new minutes of interactive video to pull you into the dastardly activities.

As in the first volume, your task is to take careful note of which people and places are mentioned, then research them all until you've gathered enough facts to go to court. You'll click more icons to visit people and locations throughout London; research Holmes' extensive files; and dispatch the effective Baker Street Irregulars to gather facts.

If you're on the trail of a solution, a video window appears and displays a brief scene containing disclosures that should put you closer to a solution. If you've chosen your suspect or location poorly, you'll hear Holmes' or Watson's digitized voice-over com-

plain about what a waste of time this trip turned out to be. When you have a solution, you'll go to court where you'll either confront the video judge and answer questions on who did what to whom or be told that you haven't gathered enough clues to enter the solution part of the game.

The game's writing quality is good, consistent with the period and the characters, although the mysteries tend to be somewhat linear with few red herrings and fewer surprises.

Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective was an outstanding game that offered a satisfying, quality entertainment experience. Its second volume is another seminal achievement in multimedia entertainment.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

ICOM Simulations, 648 S. Wheeling Rd., Wheeling, IL 60090, (708) 520-4440; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.3 or later; supports ProAudio Spectrum and SoundBlaster; CD-ROM drive and mouse required; $69.95

SOLITAIRE FOR WINDOWS

Interplay's **Solitaire for Windows** is one thoughtfully crafted PC game. Given the choice, take it over a deck of cards any time.

But why buy a Windows solitaire game? You've already got the one that came free, right? If you don't care to play anything but the standard Klondike variation, Windows' freebie will suit you just fine. But if you want a lot more variety and some additional mental exercise, Solitaire for Windows is so far ahead that there's just no comparison.

First off, Solitaire for Windows is graphically handsome. The cards are displayed in crisp detail and bright colors. More important, though, is that Interplay's package lets you kick out Klondike and pick one of 11 other one- and two-deck game versions, everything from calculation and corners to scorpion and spider. The games range from the fairly easy and fast-moving, like golf, to much more difficult challenges, like three shuffles and a draw.

Besides offering a dozen games, Solitaire for Windows gives you a choice of a dozen deck styles. You can also choose from a virtually infinite number of playing-surface designs and colors. Solitaire for Windows also keeps open the door to future modules so that you can later add games, boards, and decks as they become available.

When playing these dozen games gets to be old hat, you can go on the tour circuit, where the computer presents you with a series of different games. There's the Grand Tour, and the Championship Tour with timed play and no stopping. The Golf Tour offers nine consecutive games of golf solitaire, and the Custom Tour lets you create and save your own.

If you really want to work on your solitaire skills, Solitaire for Windows lets you save games, reply hands, and record your scores so that you can try different strategies.

As long as you're working in Windows, why not play there, too? After you've played this version of Solitaire for Windows, you'll wonder how you ever got by with the freebie.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Interplay, 17922 Fitch Ave., Irvine, CA 92714, (714) 553-6678; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 2MB RAM; Windows 3.0 or later; supports Windows 3.1-compatible; $49.95

SPACE HULK

Space Hulk is a three-dimensional science-fiction action game from Electronic Arts that's basically a computer rendition of that horrendous space marine mission from "Aliens." You're in charge of one or two squads (each consisting of up to five marines) charged with exterminating the Genestealers hiding in and roaming about an abandoned spacecraft.

In-your-face aliens are just part of the job in Space Hulk, an "Aliens"-style action game from Electronic Arts.

You can almost feel the enemy out there in the darkness, and I'll guarantee that you'll jump at least once in surprise at some innocent background sound effect. The screams that signal the Genestealers' approach are unnerving.

Even though you're sometimes forewarned by the rapidly advancing red circles on your scanner, these crea-

tures will still shamble down corridors in a hall-filling fashion not dissimilar to certain other oblong-headed alien critters well-supplied in teeth and claws. And then there are the times when they come straight through ordinary-looking walls in ambush.

In "overwatch" mode, with four viewscreens arrayed about the top of a central active screen, you see what all five marines see at any given time and fire each trooper's weapon as well. You can move the squad en masse by plotting maneuvers on a separate planning screen. Movement's a hybrid of the square-to-square shuffle and scrolling.

Space Hulk's very easy to navigate and operate, enough so that the rules become more an afterthought than anything else.

If all goes well, there's always another set of creepy-crawlies to be burned down in another dark and forbidding place. If it *doesn't* go well, you'll see rushs of claws and teeth and helmets spattered with blood – and find yourself looking soberly at five static-filled viewscreens.

Hand-to-hand combat has been slighted. If you can't shoot it down at a distance, you're probably not going to shoot it down at all. If the marine in question has the right weapon, hand-to-hand is automatic; if he doesn't, he's dead meat.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (800) 245-4525; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 2.01 or later; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster and SoundBlaster Pro sound boards; $59.95

SPACE QUEST V: THE NEXT MUTATION

Sierra created Space Quest just for laughs, but it succeeded in building a topnotch series of adventure games, too. **Space Quest V: The Next Mutation** continues the tradition and keeps 'em rolling in the aisles.

Once again, you step into the soiled shoes of Roger Wilco, the galaxy's most inept janitor. This time Roger's bamboozled his way through StarCon Space Academy and, unbelievably, now commands his own starship, the Eureka. It's only a ratty garbage scow – with a warp drive and a cloaking device – but, hey, a command is a command!

The story also picks up a piece of plot from Space Quest IV, for Rog meets the mystery woman from the Holodisk. She turns out to be an ambassador who wants the Star Confederacy to capture the Sludge Bandits. Unfortunately, Roger's not the only one pursuing this garbage-minded dream; so is Captain Quirk, commander of StarCon's flagship.

Your work's cut out for you here, for you must outwit Quirk, win the lady's hand, escape an android assassin, battle gigantic robotic creatures, and capture a gang of half-wit mutants. You also have to take out the garbage.

Space Quest is a good-looking graphic adventure game that keeps you entertained with a far-flung space trek and plenty of yuks. Humor runs the gamut from slapstick to sight gags. This fifth episode is full of perplexing puzzles as well as deadly alien encounters. Space Quest V taxes your brain more than your reflexes.

The game is easy to play. The simple point-and-click interface, where the mouse rules, will be familiar to Sierra adventure game players. And the program's 256-color VGA graphics are superb. All the hardware, including space vehicles and weapons, sport sleek, high-tech designs, while the motley cast of weird characters showcase some imaginative fantasy art.

Space Quest V is a well-designed, entertaining graphic adventure game that's funny and fun. Roger Wilco fans will definitely find their hero in good form, but be prepared to hunker down for some serious problem solving.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Sierra, P.O. Box 48, Coarsegold, CA 93644, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland MT-32, SoundBlaster, and Thunderboard sound boards; mouse recommended; $59.45

SPACEWARD HO!

Galactic conquest is the name of the game in New World Computing's graphics strategy game **Spaceward Ho!** Here you build spaceships, move from planet to planet, and set up colonies. When you meet the bad guys, you'll head for the galactic version of a dusty street for a shoot-out.

Spaceward Ho! makes good use of its "Go West, young man" theme. This strategy game balances success, adventure, planning, profit, and danger as well as any simulation of our own cross-country expeditions of the 1800s.

Choices abound in Spaceward Ho! You assign levels of expertise to both yourself and your computer opponents, chose the shape of the galaxy you want to conquer, name its size, and decide on its star density.

Once you set the stage, the screen shows the main window, where you get a view of the section of the galaxy surrounding your home planet, information about the planet you're on and others you've colonized, and a window with bar charts showing how you're spending your money on developing technologies. You control ship building and spend money (for developing weapons, shields, speed, range, and miniaturization technologies) by manipulating bar charts in the main window screen.

When it's time to get your fleet moving, just click on the planet it's resting on and drag it to a destination world. After you've checked out a planet, send a colony ship to bring in the people necessary to terraform and mine it. When you meet the enemy, Spaceward Ho! takes over –

just sit back and watch as the opposing forces face off, fighting it out on a battle screen.

Like a great flick, Spaceward Ho! keeps you entranced in a cycle of action: supporting colonies, mining marginal planets, building fleets, and thwarting aliens.

As strategy games go, Spaceward Ho! is first-rate. It's a winner, whether you want to play for an hour or for days at a time.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

New World Computing, P.O. Box 4302, Hollywood, CA 90078, (818) 999-0606; IBM PC or compatible; Windows version requires Windows 3.0 or later; EGA/VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster sound boards; $53.95

SPECTRE

The action is brisk in Velocity Development's tank shoot-'em-up **Spectre**. The competition is nasty, and the view is delightful.

This PC conversion from the Mac is essentially a nice, network-capable turn on Atari's classic Battlezone – pretty much a pure video game. You and your Spectre, a filled-polygon tank you select or design, are plunked down within a twilit and dreamlike 3-D environment of modest dimensions. To reach the next level, you must tool around and collect all the flags, blasting enemy tanks, and collecting squares to restore ammo and make repairs. When the last flag is plucked, you're credited with time remaining as a bonus and sent back up into the clouds to fight another day.

Those enemies disintegrate like so much bad reception, but the more advanced among them are good at their job. It's easy to get around, and easy to distinguish objects via the radar in the screen's upper right.

You can't save your progress between sessions, but that's not really necessary in Spectre, since you can select up to 50 starting levels or warp ahead by collecting special ground tiles once you have the lay of the land and know where to find them.

I had a lot of fun, and all by myself to boot. But it's in multiplayer/network mode that the game achieves its real potential. Of course, not many of us have access to networks, so who's going to play on one? Corporate types, that's who. And if you think that games aren't played at the office, then I've got a slice of Jersey swamp to sell you. Time wasters, some claim; necessary stress relievers, say others. What better way is there to safely beat on your boss than to trash her tank in Spectre? Spectre's fun, plain and simple.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Velocity Development Corp., P.O. Box 875, Palatine, IL 60078-0875, (708) 991-0598, IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 286 or faster); 510K RAM free (4MB RAM when played under Windows); VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster sound boards; Novell IPX- or NetBIOS-compatible network required for multiplayer play over network; $59.95

SPELLJAMMER

SSI's **Spelljammer** works with an AD&D system that takes you out of this world.

Here you command a magically powered ship that looks like a wooden-hulled boat. Instead of plying the seas, though, you're sailing through the ether and into space. Like any good character in a role-playing game, you leave home in hopes of making your fortune trading and pirating throughout the solar system.

Because you're sailing in a mystic ether atmosphere, you need to worry only about air and weapons – catapults, ballistae, even arrows and spears to attack the hostile spacefaring species you encounter.

Ship-to-ship combat is most like battles in *Buck Rogers* – simplistic and to the point. Ships carry hit points, and the object, naturally, is to hit the enemy harder and more often than he hits you. You can also attempt to ram or shear the enemy ship to or grapple with your nemesis and board her.

Up to this point, game play isn't what you'd expect from an AD&D computer role-playing game system. Although you and your crew are AD&D characters, all with statistics, spells, and an inventory of items, there's little role-playing as you know it, and Spelljammer is best characterized as a trading/combat simulation. Boarding, though, turns the tables and takes you back to the more familiar.

SPEED 4
HEADING
70
THEY SHEARED US! CAP'N!
ARGH, THE HULL HAS BEEN HIT FOR 2 DAMAGE!
3 SMALL ARMS AWAY, CAP'N
WEAPONS AWAY, CAP'N
1 ENEMY CREW KOT BY SMALL ARMS
ARGH, WE HIT THE HULL FOR 2 DAMAGE!

Spelljammer puts sailing ships in outer space. Weird.

The hand-to-hand combat screen looks a bit like a cartoonish Gold Box holdover, a top-down display of turn-based combat. But if you thought the Gold Box series was combat intensive, think again: Spelljammer will drown you in blood. And there aren't the usual puzzles to break up that river of red. Instead, you must solve an interstellar mystery and find the hidden Neogi slave base.

All in all, Spelljammer seems more like a real-time action/strategy game with a fantasy whitewash than a fantasy role-playing game. In the end, Spelljammer is an interesting excursion into a universe that deserves to be described in more detail.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086 (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible (386 or 486, 33MHz or faster recommended); 640K RAM; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, and Thunderboard sound boards; mouse recommended; $59.95

SPELUNX AND THE CAVES OF MR. SEUDO

Every so often, a program comes along that manages to slyly teach as it successfully entertains. That's **Spelunx and the Caves of Mr. Seudo,** a kids' game that combines the exploration of Activision's classic Manhole with stimulating and entertaining activities like those in the Brøderbund's Playroom. The result is an enchanting interactive world.

Just open the front door, enter the doorway, and descend in an elevator. From there, kids explore the game's caverns by opening doors, behind which they'll find numerous and creative activities.

An observatory's telescope, for instance, shows different planets in the solar system and subtly teaches basic Cartesian coordinates. A wonderful music and animation sequence called the Programmable Polka Machine teaches kids how to list tasks in a series and, in essence, introduces rudimentary programming concepts. And a paintlike program offers a digital set of ink stamps – much like in other programs, like Davidson's Kid Works II, though Spelunx records the sequence in which the stamps are placed, then plays them back. In fact, kids can also use this part of Spelunx to create simple animations.

Clever science-based activities abound. A free-moving X-ray machine reveals the innards of everything from a bird to a wall. Another lets kids set their distance from a lightning strike so that they can see the flash, then wait for the thunder to kick in – a slick way to show that light travels faster than sound.

Other activities let children control a terrarium, design and grow their own PC trees by selecting shape, leaves, and fruit, or play an arcade game where they catch toast and send it back to a pseudo-Swiss character standing in a miniature Alps.

Spelunx's graphics are first-rate, and the sound effects and music make the program enchanting. The interface is also easy to learn – easy enough for kids as young as four to navigate the caves with a mouse in no time.

Not entertaining fluff nor hardcore education but somewhere in between, Spelunx and the Caves of Mr. Seudo captivates kids in an exploratory adventure.

NOT RATED

Brøderbund Software, 500 Redwood Blvd., Novato, CA 94948-6121, (415) 382-4400, IBM PC or compatible (386SX or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.1 or later; mouse recommended; $34.95

STAR CONTROL II

Is **Star Control II** just another captain's game where you outfit a starship, assign a crew, and fuel up for a mining mission? It may be that, but it's much, much more. Part arcade, part role-play, Star Control II is all science fiction. As captain, you explore different worlds.

The game begins in the year 2155, as you captain home a deep-space exploration ship. Back at Earth's star base, you discover that the evil Ur-Quan has made a slave planet out of Terra. Selecting dialogue from a choice box, you must convince the star-base commander to help you fight back. Raw materials are needed if you're to have any hope of throwing off the Ur-Quan oppressors.

You staff your starship with a crew, buy a few landers, and top off your tank. Pick a profitable planet and landing site, and dispatch one of the landers to the surface. Guide the lander over the glowing mineral deposits, and they're loaded automatically. Here, arcade play is tense, and when you can't stand one more lightning bolt, you'll sweat the choice between blast-off and picking up that last load of precious metals.

Biological scans reveal alien life forms – blobs, vapors, or plants – which you can usually stun or at least hold at bay. Manageable samples may be valuable in later trades with other species. Return to the star base, unload your booty, and spend your credits to replace the landers you lost or modify your ship.

First contact with aliens offers a choice between attacking or conversing, but because you're as outnumbered here as you are against the Ur-Quan, it's smart to make as many alliances as you can. More than a dozen different alien warships provide fast-action combat in Star Control II – and it's a tough arcade challenge to master.

It looks as though it's as much fun to throw off the bonds of evil Ur-Quan slavery as it is for "Bones" McCoy to declare, "He's dead, Jim."

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Accolade, 5300 Stevens Creek Blvd., San Jose, CA 95129, (800) 245-7744; IBM

PC or compatible (20MHz 386 or faster recommended); 640K RAM; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, ASC Media Master, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, SoundMaster II, Sound Source, and Speech Thing sound boards; hard-disk drive with at least 6.5MB free required; $59.95

STRIKE COMMANDER

Origin's **Strike Commander** is one impressive simulation, closest not to Origin's own Wing Commander series but to Spectrum Holobyte's wonderfully complex and detailed Falcon 3.0. Set in 2011, a time when the global economy is teetering on disaster and global politics have become balkanized, Strike's mercenary fighter pilots fly late-twentieth-century fighter aircraft. They're the tools of the rich and famous: corporations, governments, and revolutionaries. This is the scene for your character, Brown Hair, a male pilot in the ranks of Stern's Wildcats, a merc squadron that prides itself on flying only uplifting missions.

Origin's Strike Commander pushes the flight sim envelope and pushes your PC even harder.

You must fly your missions successfully, with a minimum amount of damage to squadron personnel and equipment, to maintain a profit margin. No profit, no repairs and no more weapons. Meanwhile, competing squadrons are less picky about the work they choose. One in particular works for the highest bidder, so confrontation is inevitable.

Each mission and its intervening cinematic sequence moves along much as in Wing Commander, establishing the story, its plots and subplots, its characters and victims.

Using an advanced form of polygon shading and bitmaps, Strike Commander puts you inside an F-16, then dazzles you with outside scenery. Objects appear finely detailed, yet move and rotate smoothly.

Strike Commander's technical feats don't come without a price. The game occupies a minimum of 27MB of hard-disk drive real estate, and with the optional speech pack, that rises to a whopping 41MB. The recommended minimum processor is a 486/33, though Origin claims the game can play on most 386DX processors. Even on a 486/33, however, the frame rate was less than smooth.

Nor does the realism of Strike Commander come free to its players. There's lots to learn here, as with any detailed flight simulator. The flight model for the F-16 seems solid enough, which means the nuances of modern air combat need to be observed and respected.

In the end, Strike Commander gives you a brave new world where you can stretch your wings and clean your claws and offers a glimpse into the shape of flight simulators to come. Highly recommended for anyone who flies from the desktop.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Origin, 12940 Research Blvd., Austin, TX 78750, (800) 245-4525; IBM PC or compatible (486/33 or faster recommended); 4MB RAM (8MB recommended); VGA/MCGA (256-color required); DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland MT-32/LAPC-1, and SoundBlaster sound boards; hard-disk drive with at least 28MB free space required; joystick recommended; $79.95

STRONGHOLD

SSI's **Stronghold** is a SimCity-meets-Ultima Underworld game, dubbed a "kingdom simulator." It takes the simulation elements of Maxis' hit series and folds it into a three-dimensional, first-person graphics perspective that evokes Origin's Underworld look-and-feel. The result is a composite game that works.

As the kingdom's Baron or Baroness, you direct your citizens to *everyone's* benefit. If you want a building built or a tree harvested or an enemy fought, you ask your people to do it. The Ultima Underworld-like graphics then come into view. In Stronghold, you roam across your kingdom's many-colored landscapes in a smooth-rolling, 3-D, first-person point of view. The game's music and sound add a poignant touch, too, for happy times draw cheers from your people as you rise in popularity, and bad tidings arouse creaks and groans from the run-down buildings.

First you have to find a place for your kingdom. Each terrain has its pluses and minuses: water is good near farms and offers strong defense, plains make ideal farmland, mountains can be

A bit hard to categorize, SSI's Stronghold is part simulation, part role-play, part strategy fest. The combination works.

mined, and hills are good for both farming and mining. After choosing where to build your kingdom, you assign it a baron or baroness. A leader's alignment determines his or her kingdom's victory goal.

In Stronghold, like SimCity, construction is everything. You may build marketplaces, walls, bridges, and other structures. All are rendered in high detail. Existing structures can be upgraded, and they often need to be repaired.

You'll hear complaints about hunger, living conditions, or rising unemployment. Will you authorize more construction, or encourage unhappy townsfolk to travel to another keep? Decisions, decisions.

It's the combat aspect of Stronghold that deserves extra praise. Your warriors come trekking up a hill, and the mage throws her arms forward to cast a lightning-bolt spell. Conflict in Stronghold is a hands-off affair, for characters choose their own weapons and spells.

Like life, Stronghold's world and its possibilities are constantly changing. After a few hours with this hybrid, it's hard not to take things seriously, or even personally. Indeed, Stronghold may just be the beginning of a new game genre, one that stands a world apart from those it's based on.

NOT RATED

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible (25MHz or faster recommended); $59.95

STUNT ISLAND

It's time to grab your flight stick and launch **Stunt Island,** an extraordinary stunt flying and filming simulation. Like other flight sims, Disney's new title straps you in the cockpit, but its unique creativity tool kit also casts you as set designer, stunt creator, film editor, and PC movie distributor.

Stunt Island recreates the *real* Stunt Island (just off the coast of Southern California) on your PC. You can set up as many as eight different camera locations to record the flying takes. At the post-production studio you incorporate these shots into longer films that may be up to 20 minutes in length.

A sound device that's capable of playing digitized speech isn't required, but Stunt Island's dialog is just too good to miss. Even better, when your PC's equipped with a microphone and an audio board like Thunderboard or SoundBlaster, you can add voice-overs to your films.

Stunt Island's sign posts – Airfield, Production, Set Design, Stunt Coordinator, Post-Production – guide you to the game's activities. At the Airfield you can test-fly more than 50 dynamically correct aircraft, ranging from military jets, such as the A-10, to commercial airliners, such as the Boeing 727. The game also provides an assortment of props – cows, a medieval castle, SCUD missiles, beach towels, and the Estonian flag – for your movies.

When you're ready for a bigger challenge after test-driving the island's flying machines, you can visit the stunt coordinator's office. He'll provide dozens of seemingly impossible dares. You can tackle each stunt just for fun or participate in a competition in which you must complete all stunts successfully.

In addition to flying a variety of aircraft, you'll learn how to use film editing equipment in the post-production studio as you create movies from your takes. No, Stunt Island won't make you an ace stunt pilot or your hometown's George Lucas overnight. But it will help you enjoy the show – your show – one flight at a time.

NOT RATED

Walt Disney Computer Software, Inc., 500 S. Buena Vista St., Burbank, CA 91521, (800) 688-1520; IBM PC or compatible (386SX processor or faster required); 640K RAM, 570K RAM free; VGA; hard-disk drive; supports AdLib, PS/1 Audio Card, Roland, SoundBlaster, Sound Source, and Thunderboard sound boards, and Tandy sound; $59.95

SUMMER CHALLENGE

Following up on the success of its Winter Challenge, Accolade's **Summer Challenge** is an eight-event test of your Olympic abilities. Some of the more unusual Olympic events are

included here, such as archery, kayaking, pole vaulting, and an equestrian challenge. The game features some opulent opening ceremonies and serves as an enjoyable successor to the marvelous graphics of last year's real Olympics in Barcelona.

Each event was videotaped and digitized, with the perspective placing you squarely behind the competitor. This is not only the best seat in the house but also the best from which to compete. The digital sound effects of Summer Challenge also help to make the action come alive, as crowds roar approval at record hurdle times and moan with disbelief if you're dumped from your saddle. The only training included in Summer Challenge is arcade training. No hidden qualities exist – either you perform in winning fashion or you go home empty-handed.

Kayaking and the equestrian event are the most dazzling. Take your mount around the jump course with up-, right-, and left-arrow keys. The space bar makes your mount jump – unless you're too close to the obstacle and your horse obstinately refuses. No animals were harmed in the making of these segments, but you'll still flinch when you take a fall.

In the kayak, the controls again are simple: The right-, left-, and up-arrow keys make your entrant paddle, and by using Shift-cursor combinations, your kayaker digs in for a hard, sharp turn. All events are timed, and your place on the leader board is flashed each time you finish.

The "loneliness of the long-distance runner" need not enter your life just because you've gone Olympic. Summer Challenge can accommodate up to ten human players, all of whom get to pick the country they represent and the appearance of their athlete.

It's clear that Summer Challenge gets the gold. Its graphics, interface, sounds, and event selection win hands down. In the final judging, Summer Challenge is not only fun to look at but is just plain fun.

NOT RATED

Accolade Software, 5300 Stevens Creek Blvd., San Jose, CA 95129, (800) 245-7744; IBM PC or compatible (10MHz or faster recommended); 640K RAM; EGA/VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, and Thunderboard sound boards; $54.95

THE SUMMONING

Life in the fantasy lane is tough. Every time you turn around, there's another power-crazed magician trying to take over the world. In **The Summoning** from SSI, one of them, the Shadow Weaver, is at it again.

He's a nasty character who has amassed a horde of mercenaries, skeletons, and other violent riffraff for his unstoppable army. Since he's knocking everyone off, the Royal Council of Wizards and Warriors has trained *you* to infiltrate his mammoth Labyrinth alone.

Not only are there level maps in The Summoning that reflect your explorations, but you can print them out for more patient reference. Also, dozens of individual nonplayer characters occupy the Shadow Weaver's domain, eager to help or hinder you in your quest.

The Summoning's largest threat to dungeon visitors comes from its sadistically clever traps and puzzles. There are pits, teleport squares, and rooms that, when opened, contain enough monsters to worry the fire marshal.

With all this for your character to handle, it's a good thing that The Summoning doesn't overcomplicate its controls. All commands are relatively simple and easy to access.

The Summoning's visuals are high-res, 256-color VGA, and they're excellent. There's a sense of style and detail about this game that standard SSI fare of the recent past lacked.

Object handling is similar to that in Eye of the Beholder and the Ultima Underworld series – point and click on one of the twenty slots in your inventory, and transfer its contents to either hand for use.

Five factors control your character's abilities: endurance, agility, accuracy, magical talent (the number of spells you hold in memory), and magical power (the force of each spell). Although traps and nonplayer characters are always identically placed, character customization helps make for some very differently structured games.

There's nothing very original in The Summoning, but every detail is treated with the flair and imagination necessary to keep dungeon-lovers occupied for many baleful moons.

NOT RATED

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 3.3 or later; VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster sound boards; hard-disk drive required; mouse recommended; $59.95

SYNDICATE

Electronic Arts' Syndicate features an array of some 50 real-time missions in which you control up to four cyborg agents as they assassinate, abduct, destroy, and subvert to further the fortunes of an international crime syndicate.

After the mandatory setup in which you get your orders, analyze the general layout of the mission locale, and equip your team, you're taken to a three-quarter view of the city, military installation, or secret base on which you'll wreak havoc.

In the style of Populous, this view scrolls rapidly from one end to the other and is populated by several lively little citizens going about their animated business. Click on a location, and your cyborg agents deploy to that spot. It's up to you to decide whether to stroll through the town square or keep to the shadows of alleyways and sewers. Whichever route you choose, you'll want to stay alert for enemy agents and the police.

The lifelike interactive environment

ADVERTISERS INDEX

RS#	ADVERTISER	PAGE
95	Aditus, Inc.	7
99	Blue Ribbon	109
5	Creative Labs Inc.	C4
60	Electronic Arts	40, 41
29	Future Vision	93
*	G.E Information	89
137	Hi Tech Expressions	80, 81
112	Intelligent Software	127
62	Interplay	23
94	K.D. Software	57
2	Lance Haffner Games	35
17	Logitech	5
34	Media Vision Inc.	19
35	Media Vision Inc.	31
40	Media Vision Inc	69
67	Merit Software	29
*	Microsoft	132, 133
133	Orchid Technology	45
143	Paramont Interactive	52, 53
144	Paramont Interactive	90, 91
145	Paramont Interactive	64, 65
4	Origin Systems	47
28	Origin Systems	71
87	Pandemonium	11
129	Psygnosis	43
130	Psygnosis	21
131	Psygnosis	49
72	Sigma Designs	C2, 1
61	Sir-Tech Software, Inc.	3
121	Spectrum Holobyte	16, 17
*	Strategic Simulations, Inc.	55
116	Thrustmaster	159
148	Triax	15
118	Twin Dolphin	13
146	Viacom New Media	27

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Electronic Entertainment

The Entertainment Resource for the Interactive Age

In EA's Syndicate, you're rooting for the wrong side – the criminals.

takes Syndicate to the next level. Three-quarter-view games aren't new, but none have realized quite the degree of detail and realism found in Syndicate. The one fault is that characters disappear when they head indoors. Unlike in Ultima VII, the roofs stay on, making it necessary to track character movement with a radarlike display that identifies everything as a flashing dot.

These real-time thrills are dressed in a futuristic resource-management game that's less satisfying. Playing with Syndicate's resource-management elements has you carefully spending bucks on cyborg equipment, technology research, and intelligence. Then, you'll choose your next geographical target on a map screen. A successfully completed mission gains you control of another country and the privilege to tax the citizens. Of course, there are rival syndicates, each trying to overthrow you and undermine your power. You also need to recruit an ongoing stream of agents to keep a supply of evil minions.

The game's action is rich and deep, and as intriguing as the resource management is commonplace. With 50 missions, Syndicate offers up enough to keep anyone interested, even without the tax-and-spend side of play.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Electronic Arts, 140 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster); 4MB RAM (640K RAM, 3MB EMS); VGA; DOS 3.3 or later; supports SoundBlaster sound board; hard-disk drive with at least 12MB free space required; $59.95

TASK FORCE 1942

You can play a part in the pivotal events at WWII's Guadalcanal with MicroProse's **Task Force 1942,** a simulation that captures the challenge of naval command during wartime. Here you'll need both strategic skill and arcade ability. As a supreme commander, you control task groups, divisions, and individual ships in eight historical Solomon Islands scenarios, or in a full Guadalcanal Campaign.

You can take the helm of any ship to control speed, course, and gun turrets. Or command the entire task force, issuing fleet orders to maneuver in formation and attack in force.

Even though Task Force 1942 is a multistation game, you can't be everywhere at once. Any station you're not manning returns automatically to fairly competent computer control.

The view is realistic. You're close enough to see torpedo wakes and gun flashes, not to mention the towering splashes of near misses, fires on board, and flares. The *rugged* volcanic scenery of the Solomon Islands is nicely represented and lends a properly ominous feel as you order your light cruisers around a blind corner.

The game features more than 40 classes of warships, including transports, destroyers, cruisers, and battleships of both navies. Each ship is modeled in detail.

No smart weapons here; you sight your target from the Gun Director station and let the mechanical computer aim the turrets. Most of the time you'll be relying on reconnaissance and intelligence reports for advance information regarding enemy movements.

Command a single ship, and Task Force 1942 is packed with arcade action. Great images provide an exciting environment as you pop from one battle station to another and watch the Imperial Navy aflame. Commanding a division or task group requires strong strategic skills, and getting the knack of maneuvering large formations of ships takes practice.

Task Force 1942 is real-time and rewarding, the strategic elements are historically accurate, and the graphics images make it a pleasure to play. Fire when ready!

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM (EMS recommended); DOS 5.0 or later; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster sound boards; joystick or mouse recommended; $69.95

TENGEN'S ARCADE HITS

Recycling is all the rage these days, and Domark's joining in by recycling five of Tengen's older arcade titles in a single, low-priced package called

Tengen's Arcade Hits. They may not be true hits, but they're certainly among Tengen's most notable efforts.

Toobin' is a game about floating down a river in an inner tube. You have to avoid obstructions, pass through gates for extra points, and pick things up out of the river. Obstacles include pointed logs, snakes, alligators, nasty fishermen, and wild Indians. Toobin' is good fun, and there's plenty to keep you busy.

Klax has an allure similar to that of Tetris. Instead of fitting shapes into spaces, you're assembling "klaxes," a row of tiles of the same color, out of the tiles tumbling towards you. As you'd expect, the more klaxes you assemble and the more levels you complete, the faster those tiles tumble.

Hard Drivin' II, a driving simulator, sports five preconfigured tracks, as well as a track editor. Since the game is simple, you'll be whizzing by the other cars on the road in no time.

If games were like movies, you'd play Escape from the Planet of the Robot Monsters for about ten minutes before moving on to the feature attraction. Your mission is to rescue the human hostages imprisoned on Planet X by the evil Reptilons.

In APB (All Points Bulletin), you play a cop in pursuit of criminals. APB is an extremely simple game that shows an overhead view of your squad car and has you apprehending crooks by driving up behind them and turning on your siren.

Is this collection worth a few bucks? Frankly, these are the kind of games that either disappeared from store shelves a long time ago or are gathering dust in the bargain bin. The Arcade Hits is shovelware, pure and simple, and Domark's simply shoveled its backlist of pseudo-hits back into the sales channel.

NOT RATED

Domark, 1900 S. Norfolk St., Suite 202, San Mateo, CA 94403, (415) 513-8929, (800) 245-7744; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; CGA/EGA/Tandy 16-color; joystick recommended; $39.95

THE TERMINATOR 2029 AND OPERATION SCOUR MISSION EXPANSION DISK

In **Terminator 2029,** you're a Terminator robot trying to rid the world of the vicious machine intelligence, Skynet. The year is 2029. The action is spine-tingling. And this game is an adrenaline rush of the highest order.

When the game opens, you're at Resistance HQ, ready to define your character and callsign. Here, too, you can check out your enemy's weapons, and customize keys on the keyboard for your own command sequences.

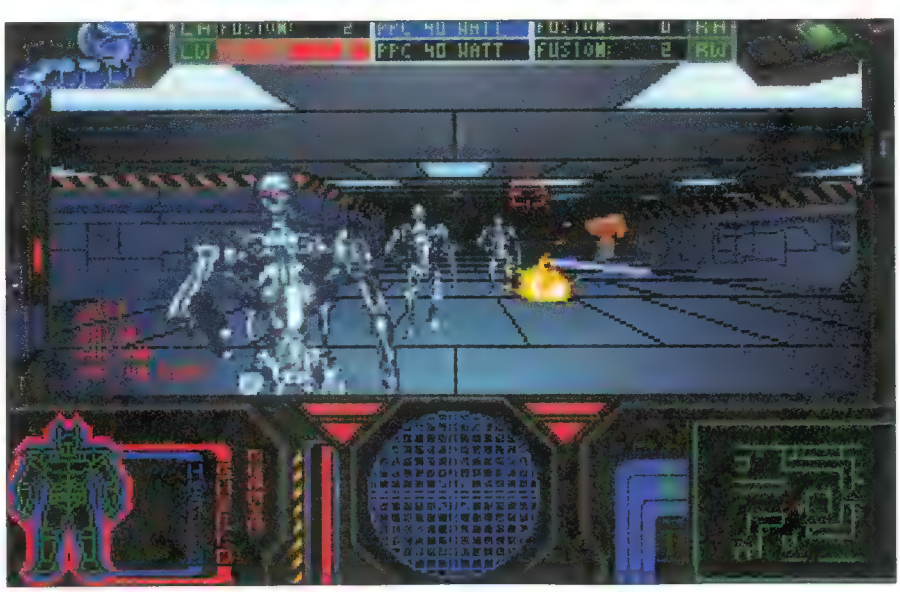
Take on the Training Simulator to acquaint yourself with the weapons, and practice using the Fusion Grenades and Phased Plasma Cannons until you know what you're doing. In the Briefing Room meet Col. John Connor and learn about your primary and secondary missions. From there, you move to the ACE Ordinance Bay where you attach plasma cannons, fusion grenade launchers, and a variety of lethal missiles to the Terminator.

Once in the battle zone, action gets hot and heavy. The Heads Up Display (HUD) in the ACE 1000A dominates the screen, with all kinds of information shown, from active weapons systems to a status readout of the ACE 1000A. Additional displays put up a navigational map and a weapons targeting grid.

As you move across the countryside toward your mission objectives, the enemy appears first on this targeting grid, then in your line of sight. By moving the cross hairs of your targeting system with the mouse, you aim and fire, with sound effects sizzling out of your PC as plasma fire streaks toward its target.

When you've exhausted the play in T2029, turn to **Operation Scour,** the game's first mission expansion disk. In this ten-mission add-on, Skynet's Orbital Satellite Platform has been destroyed, and Col. Connor has ordered a systematic cleanup of the remaining Terminators. You and the ACE 1000A have been reassigned to a base beneath Washington D.C., where you'll hunt down the renegade Terminators.

The action in both T2029 and its add-on operations is nonstop, with sound card support that draws you



Arnold's skeleton returns in Terminator 2029 and its add-on disk, Operation Scour.

right into the battle and fast animation that while not spectacular, is more than adequate for the ongoing arcade sequences.

For the arcade gamer, T2029 and Operation Scour provide enough challenge to occupy those long, winter nights.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Bethesda Softworks, 1370 Piccard Dr., Rockville, MD 20850-4304, (301) 926-8300; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster, 20MHz 386 recommended); 2MB RAM; VGA/MCGA; supports Roland and SoundBlaster sound boards; $69.95 (T2029), $29.95 (Operation Scour)

THEATER OF WAR

For all the timelessness of chess, Three Sixty thought it could do better by updating the idea to more modern times. **Theater of War** is the result. In this game, you point and click your way through the challenge of chesslike war in three different scenarios.

Instead of rooks and knights, Theater of War has archers and catapults (Medieval scenario); tanks and machine guns (Great War); and bombers and radar dishes (Contemporary). Each side's 16-man army is comprised of 6 distinct pieces, and each side's goal remains the capture of the opponent's leader.

More than looks separate Theater of War from its chess roots. In Theater of War, available commands include Assassinate, Hibernate, and Inspire. Even the size of the board can change, and each piece can modify the terrain of any square it enters. The lighter the square, the faster the movement; the darker, the slower.

Power bars indicate the current readiness of pieces, and the prudent player will order weak units to recover before sending them back into battle.

In the Medieval set, most combat is still hand to hand, although catapults and archers can attack from a distance. In the Great War scenario, all units shoot projectiles. Theater of War's Contemporary scenario, an abstraction of modern air combat, provides fighters, bombers, and missile launchers and includes orders to bomb, escort, and scramble.

You must move your pieces in concert as supply lines form outward from the King-like piece, and broken supply lines will strand your pieces in place.

Its real-time game play moves too fast for typical chess head scratching, and the abstract design of the pieces takes some getting used to. Once you've mastered it, though, the game's chesslike nature surfaces. But because the pieces move and fight so differently, you'll have to develop strategies chess never saw.

Theater of War offers a challenge, is chesslike in its basics, and includes enough high-resolution graphics to make it a pleasing place to pitch battle. Still, like the chess it calls papa, Theater of War demands your very best.

NOT RATED

Three-Sixty Pacific, Inc., 2105 S. Bascom Ave., Campbell, CA 95008, (408) 879-9144; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 2MB RAM; DOS 3.3 or later (DOS 5.0 recommended); VGA/SVGA; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro sound boards; mouse recommended; $49.95

TIME RIDERS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Time Riders in American History, an educational game from the Learning Company, spins a web of facts-gone-bad through over 400 years of time. You're looking for the same answers newspaper reporters search for – who did what, when and where – though here you're digging into a mixed-up series of headlines from American history.

Repetitious and overly mechanical, Time Riders still manages to keep kids interested with an intriguing and changing story line. Its biggest fault is that it treats players as observers – you never go back in time yourself – but that flaw can't erase the game's solid education and a rollicking good time.

The evil Dr. Dread is out to rewrite the past, using the power of telecommunications. From the satellite he's seized, Dread is transmitting false historical headlines. Your job is to uncover the historical truth, then beam it to Dread's satellite. As a Time Rider you're well equipped – you call on several gizmos, from a time machine and evidence-gathering android to a biographical database and geographical locator. Most of your time in Time Riders, in fact, is spent operating these machines.

The procedure is identical each time. You read Dread's bogus headline, identify when the event *really* happened, spot the place, identify the correct historical figure, then send your data to the satellite. This repetition makes Time Riders drag, especially midgame, for the process seems more rote than revolutionary.

But that doesn't stop you from having fun with history. Time Riders is packed with facts and works as a compelling game at the same time. Even adults can learn a thing or two from Time Riders. The cast of historical characters is diverse – you'll find the famous and the not-so-famous here, as well as several female and minority figures.

Time Riders' graphics and sounds are up to the Learning Company's typically high standards.

At the least, Time Riders keeps kids entertained while it tests their knowledge of historical facts and figures and their ability to do some elementary research. As long as they're having fun, they may not notice how much they're learning.

NOT RATED

The Learning Company, 6493 Kaiser Dr., Fremont, CA 94555, (800) 852-2255; IBM PC or compatible; EGA/VGA/MCGA/Tandy 16-color; DOS 3.0

or later; supports SoundBlaster and Roland sound boards; mouse recommended; $59.95

TONY LA RUSSA BASEBALL II

Tony La Russa Baseball II moves to the top of the baseball sim stat sheet. You'll be wowed by this new version's combination of baseball arcade action, sophisticated managerial options, and attention to detail.

Tony La Russa Baseball IIs fielding is elegant – just get the fielder inside the shrinking circle.

Stormfront Studios refined the game's user interface, enhanced its graphical feel, upped the resolution to VGA, and added compatibility with a healthy range of sound boards. In addition to a spruced-up graphical user interface, Tony II features animation and video sequences. As with the earlier version, Tony II uses rosters of players compiled from a team's history. Pick the San Francisco Giants, for example, and you manage a host of players – from Mathewson to Mays. SSI promises a 1992 team disk.

Tony II can also simulate a complete season, something that lets you play "what-if?" scenarios to see how notable historical teams would have fared if you could time travel and combine stars from a variety of eras.

Tony II breaks control into three categories: fielding, throwing, and base running, any or all of which you can hand to the computer to control. A good mix is to let the PC handle fielding while you deal with the throwing, managing, and base running decisions.

Fielding in Tony II is arguably the most sophisticated in any baseball simulation. When a ball's hit in the air, a white circle appears on the field; the higher the ball, the bigger the circle. On high pop flies, it's easy to position your fielder to make the catch. A line drive, though, yields a smaller circle, making it almost impossible to catch the ball unless it's hit right at your fielder.

Sports simulations like Tony II are deep products that combine today's advances in video, graphics, and sound with artificial intelligence. If you enjoy the intricacies of the sport as much as the joystick jockeying, you won't find a better baseball simulation than Tony La Russa Baseball II.

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Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible; 1MB RAM (2MB recommended); VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro sound boards; hard-disk drive with at least 15MB free space required; $59.95

TONY LA RUSSA BASEBALL II FANTASY DRAFT EXPANSION DISK

You can bring baseball's best back to the diamond with SSI's Fantasy Draft Expansion Disk for **Tony La Russa Baseball II**. Slap Fantasy Draft on your hard-disk drive, and you can build an entire league of dream teams inside your PC. This add-on disk lets you play with history and enhances the excellent virtual baseball experience that Tony La Russa Baseball II already provides.

The Fantasy Draft Expansion Disk isn't a stand-alone game but requires Tony La Russa Baseball II. Once you install it, the Fantasy Draft menu offers picks for setting up the draft, defining how the computer managers choose players for their team, and entering Draft Day.

Add this fantasy draft disk to Tony La Russa Baseball, and you can play baseball that never was.

As you set up the draft, you can choose the order in which teams pick players, set team salary caps, and select either a standard or an auction draft. Then it's time to pick the teams that will contribute players to the draft pool and the teams that will actually be doing the drafting. Each team in Major League Baseball is represented, and each comes equipped with a roster of yesterday's superstars.

After you've determined the draft rules, set salaries, decided who's in and who's out of the draft, and selected managerial styles, it's time to get down to business. Draft Day. Since the computer managers already have their drafting agendas set, these drafts go quickly. You pick for all positions, including a designated hitter. In all, there are 40 rounds to the draft. With Draft Day done and every team packed with heroes, it's time to save the draft and move to Tony La Russa Baseball II. There you'll actually put the teams into play and see how good they really are.

This trip down memory lane is a perfect addition to Tony II. Baseball fans will relish the opportunity to mold teams that never existed.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible; 1MB RAM (2MB recommended); DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro sound boards; requires Tony La Russa Baseball II; $19.95

TORNADO

With the help of Spectrum Holobyte, Digital Integration has produced a simulator that requires more of a virtual pilot than a quick trigger finger and a bad case of testosterone poisoning. **Tornado** actually expects you to think.

Your steed on this aerial journey is the Panavia Tornado, an all-weather, variable-swept wing aircraft designed to put smart or dumb ground ordinance precisely on target. You have a standard array of guided and unguided explosive toys at your disposal, as well as a set of rocket-powered noisemakers for aerial fireworks.

The "terminally impatient" can dive right in with the Quickstart option, while the more circumspect can try out the simulator, then the flight training, then finally several levels of "real" combat. If you do just jump right in, you'll find out why the training sessions pay off, for you must contend with several degrees of flap movement, wing sweep, and power requirements. It's a remarkably unforgiving aircraft if you don't have it properly "dialed in."

Don't expect state-of-the-art when you fly Tornado.

But before you even touch the control stick, you must plan your mission. You can either follow a preset flight plan, or you can create one of your own.

Tornado's digital terrain lets you fly fast and fly low. Depending on your mood, you can combine your maps with either look-forward or look-down terrain-following radar. This technology is a necessity if you're to complete your missions, which usually involve deep strikes into enemy territory.

On the technical side, Tornado neither rises above or falls behind the flight-sim pack graphically. You can choose various levels of ground and air shading, while the simulation's objects are standard polygon shapes. The frame-rate on a 386 PC is a bit choppy, even with everything set at the lowest level.

Tornado presents a different challenge to sim pilots used to dominating the skies with the fastest hardware available. By comparison, the Tornado's ground-hugging, low-profile technique seems almost elegant. It's not any better or worse, it's just another way to get the job done.

NOT RATED

Spectrum Holobyte, 2490 Mariner Square Loop, Alameda, CA 94501, (510) 522-1164; IBM PC or compatible (16 MHz 80386SX or faster); 1MB RAM; VGA; DOS 5.0 or later; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster sound boards; mouse required; $79.95

TREASURE COVE!

Catchy calypso melodies, charming undersea creatures, and gentle humor make **Treasure Cove!** a lighthearted, nonviolent, and educational adventure. Kids between the ages 5 and 9 will delight in the program's graphics, animation, sound effects,

and music. But parents will relish its understated talent for helping kids hone arithmetic, reading, and problem-solving skills – while teaching tidbits of marine ecology to boot.

It seems that the Master of Mischief stole all the gems from Treasureland's elves. Not satisfied, he also destroyed the rainbow bridge connecting Treasureland with Invention Island. On the island a Goobie Tube sucks goobies – oily creatures that look like those globules skimmed off the scene of a tanker disaster – from the waters of Treasure Cove. But a leaky Goobie Tube is causing the pollution problem that kids have to solve.

Kids snorkel through the cove as they investigate this sticky situation, looking for the puffer fish to plug the Goobie Tube holes. To find the fish, though, they've got to capture cavorting orange sea stars with a bubble pump, answer the puzzlers that pop up, then use the clues.

Obstacles heighten the game's dramatic tension. You need a constant supply of light energy to power your flashlight, for instance, and a steady stream of air for the bubble pump. Catching red sea stars solves any energy shortages, and you can replenish your air supply at Treasure Cove's air stations, where you coax the crabby attendant to fill-'er-up.

The game's topography boasts brightly-colored graphics that depict a peaceful, watery world. Animation adds to the game's scenario as sponges sway and eels undulate.

As you'd expect, the multiple-choice puzzlers become increasingly more difficult as you play the game and gain expertise.

Subtly integrating entertainment and education is a tall order for any game, but Treasure Cove! rises to the challenge. Its playfulness should keep kids coming back for more. And they can't help but learn from the experience.

NOT RATED

The Learning Company, 6493 Kaiser Dr., Fremont, CA 94555, (800) 852-2255; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA/MCGA/Tandy 16-color; DOS 3.1 or later; supports SoundBlaster-compatible sound boards; $59.95

TROLLS

Trolls is a roller coaster–like ride of an arcade game that sends you – as a purple-haired troll doll no less – running, jumping, and dodging over multitiered platforms, chasms, and blocks to pick up baby trolls, balloons, and bonus items.

Like a Super Mario Brothers on the PC, Trolls features leaping and jumping arcade action.

Visually, the bright, primary-colored objects slapped against the neon background is a trip, and the repetitive background music has the same soothing effect as a middle school's marching band. After an hour or two, my brain was cooked. But then, Trolls is a fun, and addictive, piece of work.

Trolls lets you head into one of the game's seven lands. Each land is further divided into three areas. On entering each area, you're told how many baby trolls you must find before you leave. There are always more babies than you actually need, but they're not easy to get: They're lost down in tunnels or up on platforms high over your head, all of them cryin' for their mommas. Collect the required number of babies and then find the one exit from this crazy place.

As you might expect from a game more likely to call the Super Nintendo home, there are also zany monsters and bouncing, rolling, flying hazards to make your task even more challenging. Look out for stuff like the electric eels, flying markers, marching toy soldiers, and paper airplanes that'll cut your life short. But there are plenty of bonus items to pick up along your way.

Besides collecting the baby trolls, the big challenge – and most of the fun – is figuring out how to get around Trolls' lands. Each area is a vast, complex maze of pits, platforms, runways, and inclines, but the screen only shows you a small piece at a time.

Trolls is some of the best arcade action you'll find on the PC. It's full of eye-zapping graphics, mind-numbing music, reflex-stretching movement, and brain-twisting strategy. If you like Super Mario Brothers, you're gonna love Trolls.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

IntraCorp, Inc., 7200 NW 19th St., Miami, FL 33126, (800) 468-7226;

IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA/VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster sound boards, $44.95

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD II: LABYRINTH OF WORLDS

Origin's **Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds** is the worthy sequel to Ultima Underworld, the de facto state-of-the-art first-person-perspective, scrolling 3-D viewpoint role-playing game. Underworld II reminds us that the competition is still a few rungs down the evolutionary ladder.

In Underworld II, the graphics and animation are better and give the game a greater sense of reality and variety. Of course, the game's smooth, true three-dimensional scrolling means you can run, jump, swim, and look up, down, and around. Game-system enhancements include slippery ice caverns and water currents, digitized sound effects, and stereo effects. Several key speeches are even digitized.

The plot is stronger than Underworld I's, for II takes place one year after the defeat of the Guardian in Ultima VII. As you gather in Lord British's domicile, the castle is covered by a mysterious blackrock gem. If you don't swear loyalty to the Guardian, you'll starve while he wages war on the rest of Britannia. To defeat the Guardian, you must find a way out of the secure prison and transport yourself to alternate realities. The clues to victory lie in the various realities, and each plane is keyed into a different facet of the Guardian's gem.

Underworld II sports the point-and-click, drag-and-drop interface from The Stygian Abyss, so veterans should have little or no trouble picking up the controls. And Underworld still has the best automapping system around, letting you take notes on the map itself.

Combat takes place in real time. Clicking on the rune bag accesses the contents, which you can order into an appropriate spell. Because spell-casting takes place in real time, too, combat continues while you rummage around for the rune – prepare spells in advance.

Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds is clearly the most graphically dazzling role-playing environment around.

The sage continues. Ultima Underworld 2 is a worthy successor to one of the best role-playing games around.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Origin Systems, 12940 Research Blvd., Austin, TX 78750, (800) 999-4939; IBM PC or compatible; 2MB RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, and SoundBlaster sound boards; hard-disk drive required; disk cache and mouse recommended; $79.95

ULTRABOTS

Ultrabots is a new simulation cum action game from Electronic Arts. A century from now, a huge UFO breaches the outer reaches of the solar system. When the ship finally parks in orbit, it delivers hundreds of immense, mindless robots who begin a killing spree on Earth. Only with all options exhausted does humanity reconstruct and launch its nuclear weapons to stop the invaders. After a successful attack on the alien bases that power the robots, the threat's eliminated.

As Earth prepares for a second visit from the aliens, the survivors feverishly retrofit the lifeless robots for human operation. When the aliens return, they'll be greeted by mankind's own 'bots. The battle for survival begins as you take command.

Action takes place on two levels. The strategic level puts you in command of Earth's army of 'bots as you match wits with a very capable computer opponent, while the tactical level challenges you to master player-controlled robot-to-robot combat. Both sides have three distinctly different types of units: well-armed Humanoids, fast Scouts, and slow-moving Net Builders.

All robots are dependent on the "net," a grid of power and communications relays. Units outside the net must use their limited battery power to defend themselves until they can return to the power grid. The key to Ultrabot success is to cripple the enemy net by destroying his relays, before striking at the enemy base.

The postnuclear world is not a pretty place, so don't look for dazzling

You don't have to be a science fiction fan to have fun with Ultrabots, an action sim that takes place in a post-nuclear world.

scenery outside your 'bot window. Inside your Ultrabot cockpit, though, it's a different story. You don't have to be a science fiction fan to have fun with this game, but it doesn't hurt to have a military outlook while doing battle.

NOT RATED

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94403, (800) 245-4525; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.3 or later (DOS 5.0 or later recommended); supports AdLib, Roland, and Sound-Blaster sound boards; $59.95

UTOPIA

Anyone can copy an idea. But take two ideas and wrap 'em around each other to make something new – that's clever. And that's **Utopia**. This spaceward synthesis of SimCity and PowerMonger is a colony-building simulation of pleasant depth, but unfulfilled potential.

In Utopia, you build an off-world colony, make it run, and make it race against time. Make its people happy and productive, make babies and bombs and, at length, defend it against one of a number of persistent alien races.

Utopia's played from an isometric point of view. You use a series of icons to construct or demolish buildings, that range from general to specific, summon a map, designate destinations for the land and air units you'll build, assign workers to different industries, set research and espionage budgets, dabble in a commodities market to supplement your monthly colony grant, or consult any of six advisors.

As usual in this kind of enterprise, connections are crucial. You can't get the tank workshop to turn out tanks until your mines are producing ore and your armaments labs are turning out weapons. You can't fly a fighter until your chemical plants have started to harvest fuel. But an equally striking feature is Utopia's level of specialization. Research is broken down into military and civilian divisions, and, if well-funded, will generate as many as 18 technological advances.

Throughout, the designers display a delightful light touch with this material. Cute. But fun? Yes. Challenging? Certainly. Worthwhile? Yes, but only up to a point.

For one thing, the scenarios play too much alike. The terrain and the alien races change, but the same tactics ultimately seem to produce the same results. Utopia was designed to be mouse-driven, yet it's not really intuitive.

Nothing's perfect. Not SimCity or PowerMonger, not even Utopia. This is one terrific idea, one still in search of a bit more articulation.

NOT RATED

Konami, Inc., 900 Deerfield Pkwy., Buffalo Grove, IL 60089-4510, (708) 215-5100; IBM PC or compatible (16 MHz 286 or faster); 640K RAM; DOS 2.1 or later; EGA/VGA/Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib and Roland sound boards; mouse required; hard-disk drive recommended; $49.95

V FOR VICTORY: D-DAY UTAH BEACH

Three-Sixty Pacific, true to its tradition of making the complex accessible, seems to have found safe haven in that no-man's-land with **V for Victory: D-Day Utah Beach,** the first of a new wargame series.

D-Day Utah Beach is a passel of five scenarios and a campaign game set on France's Cotentin Peninsula during the two months following the Allied D-Day landings in Normandy. And while it's cast at battalion/company level and uses four-hour turns, it offers both full-fathom-five depth and easy-to-grasp game play.

But this isn't a simple game. V for Victory is very much a war gamer's war game. Just listing the features would consume more pages than *PCGames* can afford. They include access to virtually every aspect of the campaign you could imagine, but they're presented in such a way that you don't feel as though you're fighting the game system instead of the enemy.

Is it fun? Yes, as long as you qualify that word *fun.* In a field in which some games wear complexity like a badge of honor, fun here is defined by the game not being unduly burdensome. The overall feeling of it is not tangled and sprawling, but small and solid.

There's an enormous amount to like about V for Victory. It uses a miniature VCR interface for more detailed order assignments – for example, telling a unit to defend, retreat, or hold at all costs when attacked. If you're not up to this military micromanagement, V for Victory lets you delegate to your computerized staff the assignment of supplies; fire support from artillery, planes, and ships; ground-unit movements; or all of the above.

The computer opponent may need to be tuned up a bit in future releases. It's tough-minded but easily beaten. The hero here isn't so much the game as the game system, something that makes V for Victory definitely worth fighting for.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Three-Sixty Pacific, 2105 S. Bascom Ave., Campbell, CA 95008, (800) 653-1360, (408) 879-9144; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster recommended); 2MB RAM; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster sound boards; mouse required; $69.95

VEIL OF DARKNESS

Replete with terrific VGA graphics, free-running animation sequences, and a score that changes with every scene, SSI's Veil of Darkness keeps you on the edge of your seat for hours, though they'll flash by like moments.

In this real-time adventure with an overlay of horror, you step into the shoes of an unsuspecting young pilot of a cargo plane forced to crash land in a fog-enshrouded Rumanian valley. As in any adventure game worth the name, you must find tools, weapons, and other items of value to continue your quest. Here, though, you're battling armies of evil entities whose only goal is to wreak havoc among the valley's villagers and destroy you in the bargain. You'll eventually encounter Kairn the vampire in his castle, but be patient and develop strength and prowess before you tackle the vampire in his lair.

As you move your character around the screen, you view the action from an above-the-ground, three-quarter perspective. Combined with some rich graphical details, this 3-D effect draws you right into the action.

Puzzles – always an integral part of a graphic adventure – are both frustrating and intriguing. Pay particular attention to the many nonplayer characters that inhabit Veil of Darkness, for interaction and conversations with them will lead you to all kinds of clues.

The topic and tone of Veil's story line leans toward the adult, for there's violence here. Depending on what fighting level you choose to play, you may see battered bodies and bones scattered throughout the valley.

In the end, though, it's the scare-o-meter that decides the issue. Veil of Darkness is a good pick for a dark night with the wind howling under the eaves and the cat nervously twitching around the room.

There's nothing like killing a vampire and winning the hand of a fair maiden to wile away the hours when gaming's in your...blood.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster sound boards; hard-disk drive with at least 8.5MB free required; mouse recommended; $59.95

VGASTEREO-F/X

If you want to upgrade your game-playing PC's hardware, take a look at ATI's **VGAStereo-F/X,** a multifunction, multimedia hardware-upgrade solution.

What's on board? You'll find super VGA; 8-bit stereo sound with an 8-watt amplifier, fully compatible with AdLib and SoundBlaster; MIDI (musical-instrument digital interface); a joystick port; and a Microsoft mouse port with mouse.

The super-VGA graphics controller is ATI's highly touted VGAWonder XL which provides excellent graphics. With 1 megabyte of VRAM, you get graphics resolutions of up to 1024 by 768 with 265 colors, or photo-realistic images of 32,768 colors (15-bit) at resolutions as high as 800 by 600.

While VGAStereo-F/X's video-speed performance falls short of a graphics accelerator card such as Orchid's Fahrenheit 1280, it's still respectable.

VGAStereo-F/X sounds great and is compatible with AdLib, SoundBlaster, and Thunderboard audio cards and features an 11-voice synthesizer (Yamaha YM3812 synthesizer) with enhanced channel separation to simulate stereo sound. VGAStereo-F/X doesn't include either an internal or an external sound jack for audio input, nor does it offer multichannel mixing.

An additional measure of VGAStereo-F/X is its MIDI capability. The accompanying expansion connector box is compatible with MIDI keyboards and other MIDI devices and offers bidirectional processing with ports for MIDI in/out/thru.

The bundle includes Voyetra's excellent program, the 64-polyphonic-track Sequencer Plus Junior – an application analogous to a word processor, though instead of words, you type and edit the musical notes' length, pitch, and position.

The multispeed adjustable joystick port provides smooth performance with your stick. A mouse port and a three-button mouse complete the list of hardware.

VGAStereo-F/X slips into any empty 16-bit full-length slot. Although the documentation is unclear at times, thanks to the above-average installation software, proper configuration is easy.

If you're considering better hard-

ware to improve video resolution and performance while adding a first-generation sound board in the process, VGAStereo-F/X is an outstanding choice.

NOT RATED

ATI Technologies, 3761 Victoria Park Ave., Scarborough, Ontario M1W 3S2, Canada, (416) 756-0718; IBM PC or compatible; DOS 3.0 or later; IBM PS/2 85xx analog, Multisync, or compatible monitor; $399 1MB VRAM, $349 512K VRAM

WAR IN THE GULF

Since I've never commanded an armored fighting vehicle, I can only suppose that the frustration you'll experience playing Empire's **War in the Gulf** is perhaps its most authentic innovation. Keeping track of just one unit is hard enough, let alone the four this quasi-sim makes you command.

The setting – Kuwait, 1995, with Iraqi Republican Guard opponents – is a reprise of Desert Storm, though this time you're in charge. With your four units of four tanks each, you're to stop the Iraqis one region, or campaign, at a time.

Before a new campaign or practice session, you're shown an overhead map of the area you're assigned and a notebook that contains a briefing. Highlighted on the map are key targets, roads, and villages of military significance and the battle areas, where enemy encounters will take place. Once you clear one of these zones, you move on to the next.

Through its four tiled windows, the battle screen gives you a 3-D straight-ahead view of each unit, though you can easily choose a full-screen perspective of any of the four for a clearer picture. Controls in each unit's window operate independently, so you can rotate gun turrets, toggle between a unit's straight-ahead view or an overhead map view to get your bearing, and fire away. Your own tanks are equipped with a range of heavy-hitting guns and missiles, but most platoons don't have all weapon types available. Smoke grenades obscure your enemies' vision, while the laser range finder helps you lock on to targets. Overall, combat is fairly realistic.

The unimpressive graphics are blocky and sometimes shaky. And the game's sound is weak, mostly rumbles and crackling booms, rather than the screaming missile effects you might expect.

War in the Gulf takes you to the Middle East, 1995, for another round with the Iraqis.

All told, War in the Gulf's acceptable graphics, liberal play options, and thorough manual provide for a combo strategy-action game that's reasonably entertaining, reasonably realistic.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

ReadySoft, 30 Wertheim Ct., Suite 2, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada L4B 1B9, (416) 731-4175; IBM PC or compatible; 550K RAM free; EGA/VGA; mouse required; $49.95

WAXWORKS

With **Waxworks,** a game that sends you exploring a hellish version of a Vincent Price movie, Accolade's added another item to the already burgeoning heap of fantasy role-playing titles. If this one has a familiar look – lots of blood and gore – you can thank Horrorsoft, the sickos behind Accolade's widely known Elvira series. This new release follows with more of the same old death and destruction.

Waxworks is big – there are more interminable tunnels and mazes than you can hack and slash your way through – but size isn't everything.

The story begins with the disappearance of your brother in the tunnels near the wax museum owned by your deceased Uncle Boris. When Boris' body turned out to be missing from his grave, you knew something was up. Suffice it to say that Waxworks tosses together a family curse, the forces of evil, and a quest. The latter has you delving into the waxworks, where each display is a magical portal to another time. There, your possessed brother is gathering evil characters out of the past to unleash on the world today.

Waxworks is pure Horrorsoft. Its color palette is a gathering of wan, corpselike, bleached hues, and the soundtrack consists of suitably ominous period music for each era you explore. And explore you will, because the game lets you enter, for ex-

ample, an eight-level pyramid, a mine, and the streets of London.

Bad guys roam the streets and hallways in wait for you. Fighting is suitably bloody, and images of dismembered and decapitated corpses are mind-numbingly frequent.

The interface display is otherwise chock-full of mouse-driven options, from a compass to the ubiquitous hand icon. Waxworks is huge, so huge in fact that its lack of automapping will discourage all but the most dedicated fan of Horrorsoft.

Waxworks tells a new story, true, with additional bloody artwork to gape at, but because it uses an old game system, it has nothing really new to offer.

1 2 3 4 **5** 6 7 8 9 10

Accolade, 5300 Stevens Creek Blvd., San Jose, CA 95129, (800) 245-7744; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; supports all major sound boards; mouse required; $69.95

WAYNE GRETZKY HOCKEY 3

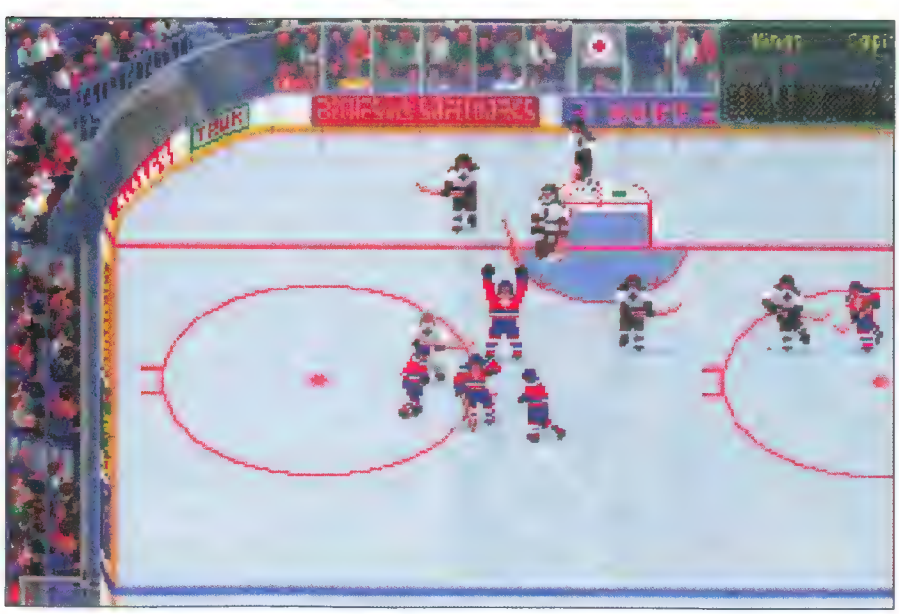
Bethesda Softworks' **Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3** is an enhanced version of an already solid game which adds digitized speech, better sound effects and animation, and a new three-quarter view of the action.

While the top-down point of view shows more of the ice surface, the new three-quarter display provides much greater detail, making you feel as if you're on the ice, not up in the rafters. You actually see chips fly as player's skates dig into the ice. But this perspective isn't perfect during game play. It's easy, for instance, to lose track of the player you're controlling because you see only about a third of the ice surface. Even though a large arrow points to the location of the player you're controlling, it's tough to know exactly how far away he is from the action.

To customize the game and its teams, you enter the locker room. You can control the coaching and playing, or have the computer handle either or both functions. You also select the quality of play. It's in the locker room where you edit your roster. You can change players' ratings and names, and by clicking on the clipboard in the coach's hands, you can change the team's tendencies.

Overall, game play in Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3 is as good as you could ask for in a hockey simulation. Hockey is a fast-moving sport, so capturing it on the PC is difficult. Bethesda Softworks continues to do an outstanding job of simulating a sport as challenging as hockey.

Even if you've never skated or been to a hockey game, you'll still enjoy the lively graphics and animations of Gretzky 3.



Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3's three-quarter view of the rink is cool.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Bethesda Softworks, Inc., 1370 Piccard Dr., Rockville, MD 20850-4304, (301) 926-8300; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM (512K expanded memory required for three-quarter perspective) VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster sound cards; hard-disk drive with at least 9MB free space required; $59.95

WHEN TWO WORLDS WAR

The premise behind **When Two Worlds War** is – naturally enough – a war between two worlds. You control one planet's wartime production and overall battle strategy, as you design and build military units; create libraries of mission programs to explore, patrol, transport, intercept, protect, and destroy; and individually improve ten technologies to give you that all-important fighting edge.

You'll need to erect Sci-Labs to perform R&D and construct mines and power stations and food farms for material, energy, and sustenance. You'll have to bump up the number of your bases so that you can specialize in different kinds of military production for greater efficiency, and group military units into squadrons with distinct tasks.

You also have the services of a "Westock-Waadam Warfare Workstation," which automates all aspects of the conflict and quickly initiates all your commands. The WWW Workstation is quite the high-tech tool. It comes with a 120+ page operational booklet, online tutorials, and a disembodied voice that

prompts you for appropriate keyboard (or mouse) entries.

When Two Worlds War is custom made for the game player who revels in multiple choices, constant decision making, and a busy, busy interface. It takes considerable time to learn, still more time to master, and with no two games alike, it's paradise for the armchair strategist.

When Two Worlds War offers an extensive series of options – time for turns, continuous modes, speed of the computer opponent, and the opponent's resources. You can play a human opponent via modem connection or direct link. The game's 256-color VGA graphics are attractive, and Aria voice recognition of most commands is provided.

Get When Two Worlds War, and prepare for some intricate and busy interplanetary conflict.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Impressions Software, 222 Third St., Suite 234, Cambridge, MA 02142, (617) 225-0500; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz 386 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.0 or later; supports AdLib, AdLib Gold, Aria, Roland, SoundBlaster, and SoundBlaster Pro sound boards; mouse required; $59.95

WHERE IN SPACE IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? DELUXE

Brøderbund Software's latest edutainment title, **Where in Space is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe,** features the famous femme fatale and a cartoonlike cadre of alien cohorts. Get in on the fun as you race through space to catch these scum bags. You just have to be 12 or older, and curious about the cosmos.

Like earlier releases, Where in Space challenges you to solve each case by gathering clues, securing a warrant, and ultimately collaring Carmen or one of her crew. At the start, the Chief at Acme Detective Agency hands you an assignment as he describes the stolen goods and the scene of the crime.

With no more than a mouse click, you're interviewing an extraterrestrial mall chick who claims to be an eyewitness to the crime. You can also visit an intergalactic speakeasy where tippling tipsters sometimes provide additional information. Or you can launch an Acme Probe to help you determine if you're hot on the trail or traveling at the speed of light to a dead end. As you climb the ranks from Space Cadet to Sun Admiral, pursuits are more circuitous and you have tighter deadlines to meet.

From a parent's or teacher's point of view, one of the game's cleverest devices is Star Search. There you're challenged to move a set of cross hairs to specific coordinates on a celestial map.

Where in Space is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe is replete with educational value. The Cosmohopper's VAL 9000 computer contains an extraordinary online database of space information you can tap into. You can learn about astronauts, astronomy, planets, moons, constellations, even Halley's Comet.

This may be the first Carmen to wear a space suit, but many of its game mechanics will be familiar to anyone who's enjoyed Carmen's exploits on earth. But it's because Where in Space moves off the history and geography kick of its predecessors that it's such a delight. The shift to space science is long overdue, and in such a solid and proven presentation, a boon to parents and a blast to kids.

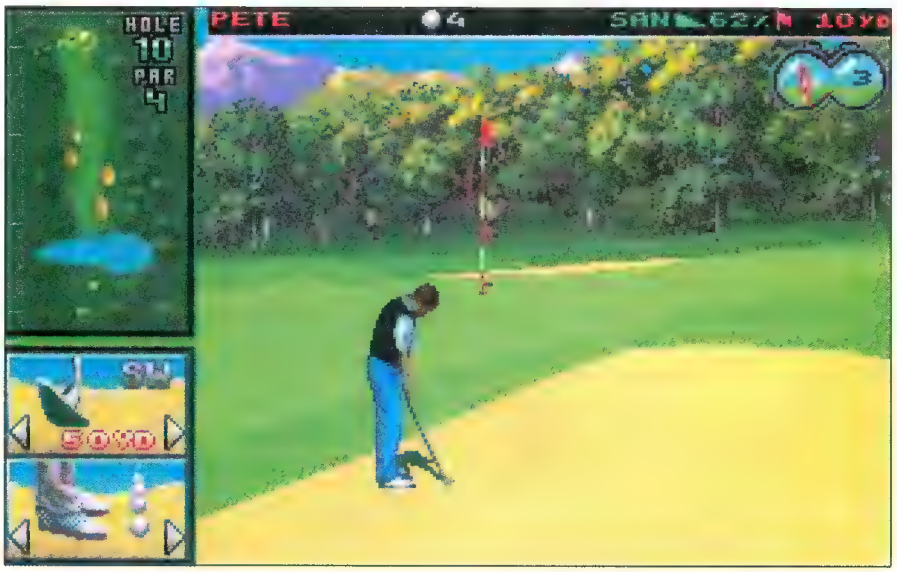
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Brøderbund Software, Inc., 500 Redwood Blvd., Novato, CA 94948-6121, (800) 521-6263, (415) 382-4400; IBM PC or compatible (16MHz or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; DOS 3.1 or later; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, PS/1 Audio Option, Roland MT-32/CM-32L/LAPC-1, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, and Sound Source sound boards; hard-disk drive with at least 8MB free space required; $79.95

When Two Worlds War makes you work hard as you fight an interplanetary campaign.

WILSON PROSTAFF GOLF

Wilson ProStaff Golf isn't normal. No famous golf courses, no add-on disks, no program packed with features. Of course, it also isn't copy protected, it comes on just one floppy, it takes just over a megabyte of hard-



Check out Wilson ProStaff Golf if you want some links without the overhead of Links 386 Pro.

disk space, and it costs only $39.95.

Can Wilson ProStaff Golf make you forget Links or Jack Nicklaus' 18 Holes of Major championship Golf? Probably not. But it is fun, and it's easy to learn and play. If it were priced at $59.95 or $69.95, it'd be a tough sell. But at less than $40, it's worth a look. In fact, Wilson's publisher positions the game a notch below those golf headliners.

Wilson scores high marks in the I-hate-to-read-manuals contest. You can be up and down the fairways as soon as the game's installed on your system.

If you've played other golf games, you'll find Wilson's interface familiar. In fact, it's reminiscent of Links': The quality of your shot is determined by timing your swing in a circular power meter.

Every golfer knows that wind is an important part of the game. The gauge at the upper right of the screen shows you the strength and direction of the wind.

Putting is a challenge. The status bar on the screen top shows you the percentage of the green's slope – for example, 15 degrees to the right, uphill or downhill. But this program's putting power meter inevitably causes trouble because it doesn't include hashmarks to accurately show the percent power levels. This makes precision putting difficult.

Since the game has only one course, you may tire of playing the same 18 holes every time out. But you can try some different variations: You can play best ball, alternate team, aggregate team, straight scramble, match plan, two types of Skins games, bingo-bango-bongo, and more.

If you've played other computer golf games, it's easy to dismiss Wilson ProStaff Golf. But if you want an affordable golf game that's easy to use, doesn't gobble megabytes of disk space, and runs well on an ancient 286, Wilson's worth considering.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Konami, 900 Deerfield Pkwy., Buffalo Grove, IL 60089-4510, (708) 215-5100; IBM PC or compatible (12MHz 286 or faster); DOS 3.0 or later; supports AdLib and SoundBlaster sound boards; mouse recommended; $39.95

WOLFENSTEIN 3-D

Id Software has taken the Wolfenstein frame and built a wonderful first-person, three-dimensional action game around it. **Wolfenstein 3-D** is drop-dead gorgeous, outrageous to the ear, stay-up-all-night addictive, and easily the best action game available for the PC.

Wolfenstein 3-D is a blisteringly fast World War II shoot-'em-up – a series of vast, ten-level mazes populated by guards, German shepherds, officers, SS troopers, floating Hitler surrogates, and less savory characters . They're all armed to the teeth, smart enough to seek you out, and painfully eager to relieve you of your pitiful life.

As you explore your prison, decorating the floor with corpses, you'll collect weapons, ammo, first-aid kits, chicken dinners, and even dog food to restore health, and treasure to

Still one of the best action games on the PC, Id Software's Wolfenstein 3-D is a bloody, butt-kicking excursion into a Nazi-infested castle.

boost your point total. And in the best Super Mario tradition, every level has a number of hidden areas packed with goodies.

The best news is, you can try Wolfenstein 3-D *before* you buy. The first episode is shareware, and widely available from bulletin boards and distributors. The full game can only be had direct from Apogee.

For sensitive souls and young children, there is reason for caution. Wolfenstein rates itself *PC-13 for Profound Carnage.* Guards writhe when machine-gunned. They go down with helmets and blood flying and a variety of splendidly blood-curdling or digitized screams. But it's also a clearly a cartoonish game rather than a fully interactive environment with the pretense of reality.

Wolfenstein 3-D is an arcade shoot-'em-up, of course, but it's the very best kind of shoot-'em-up. There's nothing more dementedly enjoyable than opening up with your chain gun on a roomful of Nazi stooges.

NOT RATED

Id Software, Inc. (distributed by Apogee Software), P.O. Box 476389, Garland, TX 75047, (800) 426-3123; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster, and Sound Source sound boards; $35 (first trilogy); $50 (all six episodes).

WORLD CIRCUIT: THE GRAND PRIX SIMULATION

While Amiga game players reveled in the thrills and spills of **World Circuit: The Grand Prix Simulation,** PC owners could only look on in envy. No more. This driving simulation is simply the best racing game ever.

World Circuit features a brief learning curve before you master the physical controls of the car and manage to keep it on the road. After that, though, you face the real challenge of racing – winning. Driving a car in World Circuit is easy; racing competitively on its 16 Grand Prix tracks is anything but.

After picking your driver you can start your quest to become king of the road. To aid beginning drivers, World Circuit offers the "ideal line" – a white line on the track that leads you to the most efficient racing path – and a suggested gear mode. Other aids that make life in the cockpit easier include indestructible mode, automatic gear-shifting, automatic braking, and self-correcting spin control. As you improve, you can shed these crutches to ultimately race on your own merit.

You must also pay considerable attention to tuning your car to the specific track. In the pits, you can adjust front and rear wing angles, breaking bias, gearing, and finally, pick your tires.

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Winning doesn't come easy in World Circuit. Practice, persistence, and the proper approach can put you in the running, but there are no guarantees of success.

Considering the amount of graphics manipulation that's going on in World Circuit, it's no surprise that the faster the PC, the more you'll enjoy this simulation.

World Circuit is certainly more simulation than game. After racing on the PC, you'll gain insights into the "game" of Grand Prix driving that are impossible otherwise. If you want to drive fast and don't want to be seeing blue lights in your rear-view mirror, this simulation's the ticket.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **10**

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Dr., Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster); 1MB RAM; DOS 5.0 or later; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, and SoundBlaster sound boards; joystick or steering yoke recommended; $59.95

X-WING

While games like Wing Commander evoke memories of *Star Wars'* space dogfights, **X-Wing** is a *Star Wars* dogfight. But concept alone can't carry a product; LucasArts had to put together a simulation that lived up to that seminal space opera.

Fortunately, Luke Skywalker himself couldn't have been more on target.

X-Wing begins with music, startlingly good when played through an audio card. Straight from the film, John Williams' award-winning soundtrack surpasses anything yet offered game players. Even the familiar scrolling text that fades into infinity appears. Thus begins the saga of a brash X-Wing pilot flying for the Rebellion.

As in many such games, X-Wing's story line is established with a series of animated screens. But here, you see the same effects you loved in the movie – huge Star Destroyers, bony-faced Imperial commanders, and scrappy freedom fighters carefully tending their ships. Combined with digitized speech, the opening sequence is like watching *Star Wars.*

X-Wing begins on a Rebel star cruiser, where you have the option of entering the Maze or flying historical simulations – two training devices – or enrolling in a tour of duty. The Maze is a series of twisting space platforms sporting fly-through hoops and firing laser batteries. Complete the Maze, and your character wins accolades. Fly the historical missions, recreations of the Alliance's most important victories, and you can garner various awards as well.

The simulation's graphics are impressive, if not overwhelming. The polygon graphics may reduce detail but provide smoother animation. You can soar down onto the surface of a larger ship, strafe, and pull up through a fireball with astounding grace.

Explosions, though, are bitmapped images, as are other dazzling effects. Sound effects throughout X-Wing are ripped right from the movie: the TIE fighters' roaring whine, the X-Wing's lasers, and the R2 unit's beeps and whistles. All recreate the thrill of the film.

Space dogfights were defined by the *Star Wars* trilogy, and X-Wing successfully recreates that feel. X-Wing. Buy it.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **10**

LucasArts, P.O. Box 10307, San Rafael, CA 94912, (800) 782-7927; IBM PC or compatible (386 or faster); 1MB RAM; VGA/MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, ProAudio Spectrum, and SoundBlaster Pro sound boards; joystick recommended; $69.95

ZOOKEEPER

ZooKeeper, a charming excursion that offers a basic lesson in zoology, opens with a typical edutainment plot – kids must save something. This time it's one of the zoo's endangered species, which must be let loose in the wild. Kids act as substitute zookeepers and keep busy maintaining the habitats.

As soon as you enter the zoo, you meet up with one of four troublemakers who strew trash, mix up the habitats' climate controls, and generally cause trouble. You must follow the troublemaker to the animal he plans to torment, then correct any problems the creature creates. No sooner have you coaxed one species back into view when another troublemaker pops up to disrupt more animals' homes. Only when you've corralled all four disrupters can you take an endangered animal to its natural habitat.

Throughout this criminal chasing and animal husbandry, kids learn a lot about the world. They learn how 51 different animals live, they learn how some animals became extinct, and they even learn how zoos replenish endangered species. Most of all, kids learn how important it is to care for more than just the tiny corner of the planet they inhabit.

ZooKeeper's graphics are excellent. By combining cartoon-style images and digitized backgrounds, ZooKeeper creates an attractive look and an interesting interface. The animal close-ups are especially impressive. Sound adds to the ZooKeeper experience, too. Whenever you see an animal, you also get to hear it.

But ZooKeeper doesn't stop at its presentation. Its integrated game is both easy and intriguing to play. Though playing ZooKeeper is easy, winning is not. This multilevel game gets more difficult as kids play along.

Zoo Keeper is a wonderful children's program. While it's packed with educational value, the game is very entertaining.

NOT RATED

Davidson & Associates, 19840 Pioneer Ave., Torrance, CA 90503, (800) 545-7677; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 3.3 or later; VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, Sound Source, Sound Galaxy, and Thunderboard sound boards; $59.95 ❑

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